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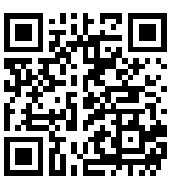

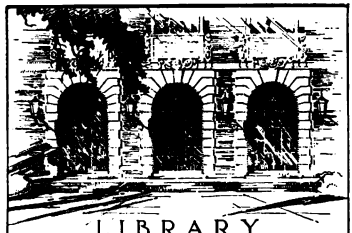

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KNOCKING AROUND

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KNOCKING AROUND

BY

FRANK H. SHAW

AUTHOR OF "THE GLORY OF LOIS," "THE KINGDOM," ETC.

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

NEW YORK 1927

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CHAPTER I

IN THE BEGINNING

My father went to Switzerland to climb a mountain. There he met a man who happened to be managing a line of small tramp steamers. That is why I became a sailor. At least, I can find no other cogent reasons. I intended to go to the Californian gold-diggings, or else to hunt ivory-bearing elephants in Central Africa, as Alan Quatermain did. Or else drive a railway engine. But I went to sea.

If my father had not desired to extend his views—he was always fond of wide spaces—I might by now be an honest Yorkshire manufacturer of low woollens, with a comfortable bank-balance, a handsome freestone house, and at least two motor-cars, one vying with the other for opulence, instead of —however, the sea netted me.

Romantic adventure was not a characteristic of the West Riding manufacturing town that framed my early years. Youngsters of my day seldom roamed far afield. They were schooled within easy reach of their homes and took such holidays as were obtainable at Blackpool, Morecambe or Scarborough; they married, as they grew out of youth, local girls. The herd instinct was strong. To yearn for a foreign girl from Halifax or Bradford was to be heterodox. And I distinctly remember my grandmother saying—this when I voiced a boyish wish to see God's wonders on great waters—"Far better that you were dead, you impious boy!" I have still a sneaking feeling tucked away inside me that I lost caste amongst the elect when I ultimately chose my vocation. I know that I was severely and comprehensively prayed over in chapel, week by week, as a brand to be snatched from the burning. We were a prayerful crew!

Sailors, I was told by many people who had never seen a

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sailor in the flesh, were blasphemous, immoral outcasts—with wives in every port—loose-living drunkards who rightly died appalling deaths and were afterwards doomed to hell's hottest fires. That was Huddersfield's notion—the town that had given few of its sons to the sea.

But the sea-call reached me there amongst the smoke, even so far inland. And I am not sorry that it did. Answering that call, through the chequered years, in peace and in war, resulted in a lot of fine, confused knocking around, wherein I rubbed shoulders with queer folk of many colours and points of view, saw not a few unusual places, was witness to some tragedies, and—God be thanked!—heard a few ripples of humour. Looking back along the perspective, I find the humorous elements exceed the tragic; so I've no quarrel with Fate.

I was eleven years old when the shipping manager I have spoken of met my father in the Alps, and afterwards came to my home to elaborate his conquests, and to plan, I think, future attacks. He and my father were ambitious to beat the Matterhorn before they became too old. My brother, five years my senior, was something of a physical weakling.

"Send him a voyage in one of our ships," suggested my father's friend. "It won't cost him anything beyond the price of his food and a tip to the steward; and it'll do him all the good in the world."

My brother protested: he would be lonely in a lonely, unsympathetic world.

"Well, let Frank go with him," suggested our friend. And I went. That month-long trip cost us five pounds each, plus a ten-shilling tip apiece to the steward. Memory growing brighter as age advances, I remember the intimate details of that first voyage far more closely than those of many others much more startling and adventurous.

In the first place, there were delays. The selected ship, the *Northcote,* was late in arriving at her port of lading. She'd run down a fishing boat in a thick fog, it later transpired. I accompanied my brother to Blythe, expecting to find there

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such a ship as carried Nelson to victory at Trafalgar, or as housed Peter Simple or Midshipman Easy. I pictured her—even then I must have been afflicted with an imagination!—leaving a sun-washed wharf in a glory of light-gilded canvas, cheered on her way by brightly-shawled wenches, with her honest, hearty crew dancing hornpipes on her snow-white decks to the accompaniment of a fiddle played, for preference, by a black man with a wooden leg. The coloured plates presented with the monthly number of the *Boy's Own Paper* were responsible for these visions, I believe. Do you remember them? Your fathers allowed the newsagent to deliver the monthly parts in their orange-hued wrappers as a matter of course, because the journal was published by the Religious Tract Society and above reproach; but you always spent your Saturday penny in buying the weekly number to see how the serials were getting on!

The s.s. *Northcote* was unlike the pictures, real and imaginary. Yet she was a ship, and as such, a magical, mystical thing: the first I'd seen at close quarters. She was, to me, an argosy of high romance. Probably, she was listed in Lloyd's Register as a single-screwed, double-compound, schooner-rigged cargo tramp of 1,200 tons or thereabouts. I don't know. To me she was all the *Santa Maria,* the *Golden Hind* and the *Revenge* rolled into one. She was bound to realms of faery; to the Islands of the Blest. Pirates were already lying in wait for her in the offing! Actually, she was loading coal for the Gibraltar hulks; thence she was going to Huelva to take in iron ore for Glasgow. What of it? A child's thoughts roam over the shrouded, befogged valleys, and soar to sun-washed pinnacles, and it is right that they should. Maybe I absorbed more genuine romance out of that prosaic, chattering, grimy trip than Raleigh took out of any of his voyages.

I admit to disappointment in the captain. What had I pictured, I wonder? Barrie hadn't created Captain Hook in those days; Stevenson had just devised Long John Silver, though I hadn't read "Treasure Island," because it was not in the Sunday School library, and, anyhow, savoured too

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much of the world. I think my boyish conception of a sea-captain ran about midway between these two types. I know a beltful of cutlasses and pistols were mixed up in the picture, together with gold lace, white duck breeches of the petticoat pattern, and a patch over one eye, as proof that my captain had undergone torture rather than reveal the whereabouts of the hidden treasure he had taken after hectic combat from the freebooters of the West.

Baggy, much-worn tweeds of pepper-and-salt pattern, a square-topped bowler and a collarless shirt seemed out of place. In lieu of my hornpipe-dancing, slack-hoisting tars were four disgruntled foreigners shovelling coal off the littered decks. There were no glistening pyramids of snow-white canvas; but there was a steam winch chattering and clashing; there were whole truckloads of coal being dapped over gaping hatches, and spilled by a raspy magician in oily dungarees, who was armed with a long iron-shod pole.

I had promised my mother to keep a diary. Some time ago I discovered that diary amongst my father's papers after his death. Sight of it fetched a tightness to my throat. Parents think more of their children than those children sometimes realize!

I read: "Arrived aboard the *Northcote*. Had corned beef and pickles for supper; jolly good!" So the corned beef and pickles *were* the first day!

Principally I remember the boatswain and donkeyman of the *Northcote*. The boatswain could not read or write. He was a Briton and he spoke one language: his own, with embroideries such as befitted his rating. The donkeyman was a Bulgarian; he also could neither read nor write; but—he spoke nine languages with fluency. The boatswain joined ship—she was a weekly boat, where the crew provided their own food—in a drunken state, armed with four bad cabbages, and nothing else, as his food supply for the first week. The donkeyman joined ship in a thoroughly sober state, with amply equipped food lockers. He used to regale me with weird, semi-oriental dishes of his own devising—like Balkan nightmares

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they seemed to me—in between the regular cabin meals, so I know he was well supplied. Pilau was one such dish: my first introduction to foreign cookery; and the donkeyman had brought a chicken for the purpose; he fed it like a canary.

Both men were equally good at their appointed tasks: both held the confidence of their superiors. The boatswain's ambition in life—voiced throatily to me after I'd read him the captions under the pictures in *Comic Cuts*—was to get the much-adjectived voyage finished and spend his pay-day on a thoroughly good blind-oh! The donkeyman's, to start a properly equipped engineering shop somewhere in the Orient where he could effect "cheap repairs for the cheap 'uns." The boatswain taught me to swear in honest dock-side English; the donkeyman tried to teach me modern Greek—with less success than his shipmate.

Thus, according to the standards of civilization, the Bulgarian donkeyman was the worthier citizen. Now, judge both by the standards of the exacting sea!

I say the *Northcote's* homecoming had been delayed because she had run down a fishing smack in a fog-blinded gale of wind. When the collision occurred the donkeyman locked himself in his cabin and loaded his clothing with scrap-iron so that, if the worst came to the worst, he would drown quickly and be spared suffering. The boatswain was asleep in his bunk. It was the end of March, in the North Sea. The boatswain, awakened by the shock and the shouting, hopped out on deck in his underwear and heard the news. He dived overboard, secured two fishermen who were drowning, swam with them to a Jacob's ladder thrown overside; caused one fisherman to cling to that appliance whilst he himself hung on to the ladder with one hand, and stuck there, the ship rolling frenziedly, until further aid was forthcoming, thus saving the lives of both.

Having, I hope, paid your money for this volume, you are at liberty to make your choice!

There was an inbred hostility between these two. The boatswain had small tolerance for the sober and thrifty me-

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chanic. He called him "You b—— Dago!" often and emphatically. Looking back on it, I think the enmity originally began on account of some light-o'-love in Messina or Constantinople. I fancy, however, that my sympathies then were with the donkeyman, because of the pilau as likely as not, and the cunning models of ships that he made out of hatch-wedges; and, also, his forbearance in the face of blasting insults may have had something to do with it. When the boatswain had repeated his entire vocabulary several times, the Bulgarian would shrug his shoulders and say: "Take no notice; oh, dear me! Goddam Anglish—oh, dear me!" and then prepare an appetizing dish of meat and spices under his cabbage-fed enemy's very nose!

The captain of the *Northcote* was anxious to get his ship laden and away quickly, in case she should be held to account for that collision. So we sailed, with decks cluttered rail-high with coal, in a grey dawn into the misty noisiness of the North Sea. My brother and I were allowed on the draughty bridge, and the steward brought us huge mugs of piping hot tea and buttered biscuits. That's about all I remember of my first sailing day. There was no music, no gay wenches waved farewell. I know Neptune captured me shortly afterwards, and the two ensuing days were vague blurs. I was on deck, however, to see the flashing windmill arms of the Ushant light, and the mate—a soured old man—told me that if the ship went close enough to that vivid beacon one could see the ghosts of drowned sailors beckoning. It was a creepy story, as he told it; and I've always been uncommonly scared of the Ushant light ever since!

Queer pictures leap out on the silver screen of memory! One is of a becalmed sailing ship with painted ports, which the helmsman told me was a pirate. I spent a lot of time searching for the *Northcote's* guns, but found none: not even a signal cannon! Another picture is of the long, even swells of Biscay: cruel, greedy swells they appeared to me; and the choking gurgles they caused in the scupper-holes every time the wallowing steamer rolled might easily have been the death-

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cries of drowning sailors. And then: a foggy night near the Burlings—engines going slow and the fog-horn braying raucously, and my brother valiantly reading the Bible in the intervals of sea-sickness! And, after that: the sun-washed bay of Gibraltar, with a white-and-gold warship at anchor, and a natty steam launch, with snowy awnings, ranging alongside. There's a morning that stands out vividly in memory. Twenty-five years later I visited that Rock; later still, I was required by my duty to engage an enemy submarine within sight of the cloudy mass; but never again came that glorious initial thrill. I wonder why! Of course, I'd read Henty's "Held Fast for England." I knew all about Gibraltar's history even then, to the legend of the Queen of Spain and the English flag, for we'd brought "Innocents Abroad" as our *vade-mecum;* and even to-day I doubt if there's a better guide-book for the Mediterranean.

An amazing morning, that: when the *Northcote* tied up alongside an ancient wooden hulk that had once been a glorious sailing clipper; and I skipped from ship to ship and paced the rotting fabric's poop with pride, as I might have been Peter Simple himself!

The boatswain threw a thieving Rock scorpion overboard, and hurled chunks of coal at him as he swam and spat. Bumboats came alongside—I remember the mate searching each basket of provender as it came aboard: looking for grog, of course.

Then we went ashore under the captain's wing: were annexed by a tawny guide, conducted before an austere military officer, and, he being satisfied that we were not enemy spies, were permitted to view the enchanted galleries. And enchanted they verily were, to two romantic boys. We peopled the casemates with half-naked gunners, slaving like maniacs at their hot, leaping sixty-four pounders; we heard across the gulf of years the cheers that greeted each successful hit; we named each one of the draggled hulks in the bay for some besieging French or Spanish ship of the line. We craned out perilously from the embrasures, to which, in fancy, striped-

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shirted, round-hatted tars scale the rocky face, cutlass in mouth.

Then a beefy Bombardier of the Garrison Artillery told us he'd thundering well box our saucy ears for us if we didn't quit playing those dam-fool tricks, since he was responsible for the life and limb of sightseers; and where'd his promotion be if we broke our necks? So we ascended to the summit, in search of monkeys, which we didn't see and didn't even hear. I've always been a bit sceptical about those monkeys, for, though I've visited Gibraltar a dozen times since then, I've seen never a simian.

Still, we'd seen Africa a-shimmer under the radiant sun, parted from us by a wealth of white-capped blue water; and we went there in boyish imagining to hear the lions roar as Robinson Crusoe had heard them: we peopled that yellowish glare with sportive Bedouins, and shivered delightfully as we reflected on precisely what would happen if the *Northcote,* in her further voyaging, happened to be wrecked across the Strait. Then we descended, to be besieged by touts endeavouring to sell us models of the eighty-one-ton gun that was the biggest gun in the world at that time, models carved from the golden-coloured rock itself; and, further, offering us sights such as human eyes had never hitherto seen. But it was a toss-up: a model cannon or a feed of sticky cakes washed down with milk drawn from the cow under our eyes; and the cakes won in a canter. When next I visited the Rock, after that quarter-century lapse, the eighty-one-ton gun was as obsolete as the *Victory* herself, and the models had ceased to exist. And I've always longed to possess one of those charming toys, though I suppose I never shall. However, the sticky cakes were uncommonly good—I tried them again my next visit and wondered why they'd seemed so good—and we carried them out to Europa Point to eat them; and the garrison being at firing practice, we heard the shot whining overhead, watched them plump into the sea, and translated ourselves back a hundred years ago and were, to all intents and purposes, in action.

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Then, to the port, to seek adventure; to gaze awestruck at the real eighty-one-ton gun, which impressed me as being like a glorified lemonade bottle, though we were assured that it could land a shell on African soil as easy as winking. An optimistic estimate of its powers—its promise was better than its performance.

One vivid memory of that day's outing remains clearcut in my mind: of the Black Watch, in all the glory of tartan, scarlet, and bagpipes, swinging down the dusty road from Europa Point. The next time I had dealings with this famous regiment was amongst the unspeakable mud of Flanders fields; thirty years or so later—no scarlet there, save their honest blood, no skirl of "ta pags," but splendour none the less: the compelling splendour of heroes who knew how to die!

And so to the water-port before the gun was fired, and aboard, after a never-to-be-forgotten day.

And then, the succeeding day being Sunday, to Algeciras, to witness a bullfight, of which I remember only the wine-sellers, the purveyors of paper cushions to alleviate the harshness of the stone seats in the bull-ring; the horrid screams of disembowelled horses, and the pungent stench of blood and sand. Of the actual bullfighting I do not recall a single detail; but I seem to recollect shrill cheering from the mantilla-shrouded women, and a medley of vivid colouring in the fighting-ring itself: that must have been the leaping bull-fighters. I know I thought it a cruel and sickening pastime—fit only for Spaniards!

None the less, it was thrilling to know that we actually stood on foreign soil, under an alien flag. It was impressive to hear a tongue unknown spoken about us; to be accosted by a cloaked and leprous beggar, who demanded, "Plata, plata, por l'amor de Dios," or words to that effect, to peer into shadowed shops, where barbers plied their trade with a brass bowl of soap-suds beneath each client's chin. My brother had acquired the *toga virilis* ere this.

"Go on: have a shave!" I urged him, scenting adventure.

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"Not likely—they'd cut my throat," he gloomed darkly; and I'm certain he believed they would. I know I did, when he said it that way, for we were "gringoes," and England had been at war with Spain a trifle of a century or so before. I doubt if either of us felt really safe until we stood once more on the *Northcote's* rusty decks! But it was thrilling, even as it was thrilling to see some burnoused Arab, from across the water, pad mysteriously down the Gibraltar streets.

Going round to Huelva was a poignant business, for we hit bad weather, and the ship, flying light as she was, played kiss-in-the-ring with herself clear through the beastly, spasmodic night. We were both very sea-sick—possibly by reason of the much fruit we had eaten at Gibraltar, for it may be assumed that our stomachic cargo-capacity was limited only by the modesty of our pocket-money. Being averagely healthy youngsters, we ate freely and indiscriminately; suffering, as we did, from the everlasting vacuum of youth; and although we had been duly impressed by the sights of the Rock, we had been even more impressed by the fact that oranges were a hundred or more for a shilling, and that they possessed a flavour hitherto unknown when poured into our hats by a burnoused Moor who might have stepped bodily from the illustrated Bible at home.

Of Huelva I retain only vague impressions—of raw red iron-ore being everywhere, of the ship and ourselves being coated with clinging dust, of that dust being in the water we drank and the food we ate. As there were no sights of interest, the skipper took us under his wing on his shore-going expeditions. I'm certain we were abominably in his way! For his shore-going consisted in, so far as my memory serves me, paying visits to agents and ship-chandlers, where were back rooms and shady *patios* and many other ship-masters, all suffering from the thirst that iron-ore begets. Thus we boys sat and watched much liquor consumed; and as every fresh intruder meant a fresh round of drinks, and as we were included—in the catholic fashion of sailormen ashore—in each succeeding round, we drank enough lemonade between us to

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make us feel like Montgolfier's balloon. We sat and stared, listened to questionable stories that we did not understand, and sucked up sweet, syrupy lemonade as the Sahara might suck up a shower.

One incident propels itself from the crowded picture: of the skipper—this must have been sailing-night—being escorted by many other fellow-skippers down to our ship's boat. Every now and then the party stopped, either to sing a chorus or to dance an intricate eightsome reel; cork-poppings accompanied such stoppings. A lean and long skipper serenaded soulfully beneath a barred and balconied window; there was feminine mirth behind. It was a very glorious, silvery night, I remember. Veiled figures flitted mysteriously past; there were softly spoken "Buenas noches," glances from bright eyes insufficiently screened by the white mantillas. Halfway down to the landing-place our captain remembered his walking stick. All hands linked arms and went back to find it—searching each place of call. There were many more gallons of lemonade ere the walking stick was discovered hanging to the skipper's elbow!

And when the boat was reached there was but one sailor in it. The second man made his appearance later, after much confused shouting. He was wiping his lips and walking with the terrible carefulness of the man who has drunk wine; he huskily explained that he had just run ashore to secure fresh food supplies.

"Show them!" demanded the skipper, but beyond a packet of cigarettes and a bottle of Malaga, nothing was forthcoming.

"Get aboard!" roared our captain, and when the man did so, he felled him with the tiller, took his oar himself, and off we went, amid an approving chorus from the remaining skippers.

"Disc-dishipline mus' be maint'ned," mentioned our commander gravely. "Who'sh goin' gemme nuzzer drink?"

These were but boyish memories gleaned from the misted past. I do not set them down as momentous happenings, or as precocious comment on the things that were. So far as I

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can remember, such was my first voyage. Of the homeward passage I retain but few details. The captain, thrifty soul, had bought a dollar's worth of oranges prior to leaving Huelva. With what to-day would be called a sublime gesture, he waved to the golden fruit in the lower drawer and invited us to enjoy his bargain.

Three days later he went to help himself to an orange. There weren't any! He was terribly angry, and he was also amazed. He seemed to think it was an impossibility that two boys could have accounted for the best part of five hundred oranges. Still, we had!

Another of our captain's purchases at Huelva was the carcass of a sheep: fresh meat for the cabin table. For the first three days—there was no cold storage—it was palatable. The fourth day——! The fifth——! I believe the meat was finished and conceivably enjoyed by the hard-case cabin crowd; we two had no tooth in it after the third day. We contented ourselves with a stodgy delicacy devised by the cook out of potatoes and dripping: a potato-cake, and jolly good and filling it was, too. That, and bully beef and pickles.

The *Northcote* carried her cargo up across the Bay through heavy weather, at which we toughened veterans smiled, and so to the Clyde. We were roused from the transom lockers, which were our couches, to behold Ailsa Craig in the rosy flush of a Maytime early morning. The mate blew the steam whistle as we approached the rock; the air promptly filled with myriads of sea-birds. They darkened the sky; their mewing cries drowned down all other sounds. And then we came to Glasgow, navigating the odorous Clyde in the gathering warmth of a perfect day, and I knew that, come weal come woe, the sea had claimed me as its slave.

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CHAPTER II

A LOUD CALL AND A CLEAR CALL

Not that my enthusiasm aroused any approval when mentioned, mark you; I seem to remember pitying smiles, and a general suggestion of "You'll soon get over that!" everywhere about me. Moreover, I was uneasily conscious of the final farewell from the boatswain of the *Northcote,* there at Queen's Dock, when we went the day after our arrival, to bid adieu to recent shipmates. The boatswain had been paid off and was not sober. He had spent some time in seeking out the donkeyman, his enemy: determined to obtain satisfaction; and he had hunted, apparently, chiefly in the booze-dens of Glasgow's waterside.

He was intoxicated enough to be fatherly in his manner. He pushed back my cap, took me on his knee, smoothed the hair I do not own to-day, and wept a little. He gave me five shillings, and huskily said that his own son would have grown up into just such a golden-haired boy as I, if only he'd married and had a son! I told him—anxious to thank him and compliment him in return for those two rare half-crowns, that I meant to be a sailor. His immediate question struck my youthful mind as curiously irrelevant.

"Have ye such a thing as a bath-room in your house at home, sonny? Answer me now, Franky, as you'll have to answer yer Maker in that last dreadful day!"

"Yes, oh, yes," said I, trembling; "yes, bosun; why?"

"Before ever you thinks serious of going to sea, boy, you ask yer father—arsk him polite but firm, mind—allus be perlite 'cept to Bulgarian potater-peelers—arsk him, yer dear daddy, to take yer into the bath-room, where he won't make a mess, an' cut yer throat—sst! like that. It'll save yer lots o' trouble in the end, Franky; the sea's a dorg's life!"

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Like most other deep-water sailors, he constantly voiced an implacable hatred of his vocation: but I have doubts whether, if other opportunity had occurred, he would have "swallowed the anchor" and settled down to the prosaicness of a life ashore. I fancy that he must have seen in imagination those bright-eyed, velvety-voiced señoritas beckoning coyly through silvery moonlight; and heard tinkling laughter behind the guarded windows; decided that a "hauf mutchkin" or a "swally an' a chaser" lacked flavour when weighed against memories of heady Spanish wines or smuggled aguardiente. For the sea is an insistent mistress at the best: urging her claims at most inopportune times. I have known myself troubled by the compelling sea-fret in an orderly, unimaginative drawing-room a hundred miles removed from tide-water, in an environment of stolid business commonplaceness, just because some amateur Caruso has sung a song that mentioned: "A schooner in the offing, whose sails are shot with fire." I have felt deep water calling when passing a store in a Midland town, just because a hot forenoon has fetched an almost imperceptible odour of Stockholm tar from a hank of cordage intended to serve as a clothes-line maybe. I have talked with ancient mariners—men who are sidesmen in their parish churches, and lights of the local Urban District Councils, men who have publicly protested their disbelief in the call of the sea, men who have preserved an unmoved front when told of the beauty and yearning of Masefield's sea-hungry line: "All that I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by." I've talked with them, I say, and we've jeered together at the hardships of seafaring, and vowed that wild horses would never tempt or drag us back; ay, we've reviled salt water with the curses of salt water, and then—"Good days in the Trades, though——" they've said, with far-off expressions showing in their eyes. And I've known—haven't I suffered?—that these men's thoughts are away on sun-washed and wind-crisped water; that they can hear the hearty Trade winds harping in the rigging and the booming and

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rustling in the distended canvas, with the reef-points frap-frapping like the beat of a compelling drum sounding the rally for the enduring warfare of the Horn——

Pah! a truce to it! I'll get me to a place I know of where the rasp of the wind in the tree-tops is curiously like the swoosh-swoosh of white water rustling along a ship's eager sides, and I'll thank the particular God who took me from the bitter servitude of the sea and cast my lines in pleasant places!

Let's imagine that hoary Time, playing cup-and-ball with human destinies, has spun the world round five times. Let's lower the curtain as an indication that fully sixty months have elapsed, during which time a normal boy has led a normal life of school and games—no more of the former than could be helped; imagine that bait after bait has been dangled in front of that boy's eyes: the awe-inspiring profession of medicine—and I did pass the preliminary exams for that notable calling—the fascinations of a farmer's life, with naught to do save ride noble horses and shoot noble pheasants —let's imagine a father turning a stern, uncompromising face against all cajoleries anent his son being allowed to try for H.M.S. *Britannia*—Marryat was getting in his insidious work about the time—and let's lift the curtain again, to disclose the unheroic hero of these random reminiscences, a bit bewildered, a great deal frightened, and still more ignorant, face to face with the stunning reality that the opposition had been withdrawn, and a straight course stretches between him and the fulfilment of desire.

I was told that I could go to sea.

The big question was: how to set about it. All the books in the world didn't appear to offer much genuine help. They generalized, with poetic interludes, and I desired particulars. Chance sent a *bona fide* sailor across my path—he later had much to do with finding the first gold at the Klondyke diggings—but a letter to the firm in whose service he was elicited the reply that no vacancies for apprentices were likely to

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occur in the Sierra Line of sailing ships for at least twelve months. Twelve months—to a boy who mentally saw himself commanding an armada in less than six!

My father went to Switzerland again and climbed another mountain. Returning, he spread the glad tidings that he had met a man who knew something about ships and the folks who owned them. This man strongly advised that I should not be permitted to go to sea. But a boy's will is superior to sage counsel; certain letters were written: an early vacancy was discovered. I signed indentures that bound me rather more tightly than a jail-governor's entries bind a life convict; and, behold, I was a potential sailor: an embryo, and uncertain whether I was glad or sorry. Be quite sure that I was as scornful of landsmen as ever Mulvaney was of elephants, before the ink was dry on the parchment. I discovered those indentures, mellowed by the years, recently—the ink of my signature rusty-brown; and I swear the sight of them fetched back ancient ecstasies and brought to mind the stink of brand-new oilskins and the glory of my first sea-chest!

I promptly cultivated an exaggerated nautical roll. It seemed to me that the whole world was insufficiently big to contain my magnificence. I moved, conqueringly, amongst all the stars in the firmament. And, boy-like, I gave no second thought to patient mother fingers sewing lovingly, tear-wetted perhaps, at shirts and pillow-cases and the like, gave no thought—alas!—to the sighs that spaced the exquisite stitching. It was my mother who broke down my father's opposition to my leaving the homenest, and who, incidentally, half broke her own heart in the doing of it: for, when all's said and done, a son is a son—even if he be one of many. I do not know what fearsome pictures seared my mother's mind as she stitched away at the garments destined—more shame to me!—to the scurviest treatment by one unthinking of the love that went to their construction; but I think those pictures were of the most terrifying character. For I retain a poignant memory or two of a wan face at the breakfast-table, as if a sleepless

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night had been watered by many tears; and I remember, too, a reluctance to permit the embryo seaman out of her sight, and a wavering, intensified sweetness in the welcoming smile that greeted each return. We men who knock around, claiming all the wide world as our stage and its fullness our lawful heritage, know very little of the havoc which our over-impetuous feet unthinkingly trample; but the mothers that bore us know, as they know the empty ache of lonely souls bravely masked by encouraging smiles and the rich delight in ultimate rewards. To all mothers whose strong sons achieve greatness or the realization of ambition belongs the glory thereof by right; ay, and to the mothers of those who falter and fall in the mad race belongs the hope that sent the weaklings forth to pit themselves against the menaces of the struggle that ends in what the world calls success.

Our mothers are the real Empire-builders, let any who dare deny it. I know it; for in odd corners of the world I have talked with men who achieved the terrible summits, urged by desire to justify themselves in their mothers' sight.

My opinion, after the first glamour wore off, was, and still is, that those indentures were far and away too severe; that they amounted, to all intents and purposes, to false pretences on the owners' part. They—the owners—deliberately presumed on the average romantic-minded boy's ignorance of all the genuine conditions of seafaring. They gave the narrowest reward—a bare ration of the cheapest food procurable, an irreducible minimum of water, as established by British law, in return for slavery. They gave no wages; they granted not so much as a "donkey's breakfast" by way of bedding. Of their own free will they gave no tuition of any sort in the work of a sailor. Educational facilities there were none: such skill as could be acquired during the apprenticeship must needs be picked up when opportunity offered, by dint of sacrificing scanty leisure and by presuming upon the ready aid of some old forecastle shellback, who would sit up for

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half his watch below, for the sheer love of instructing the coming generation in the rudiments of the craft of the sea.

During my apprenticeship I never once handled a sextant—the initial working tool of a navigating officer. But, for weeks on end, under a grilling sun, I handled a coal-shovel to save those money-grabbing land-pirates of shipowners the hire of even the cheap peon-labour of the South American ports. The entire system was an infamy; but it was an infamy by which the owners profited handsomely. Not a ship of all their imposing fleet but carried at least eight apprentices. Many carried as many as sixteen: *and every apprentice saved a qualified seaman's wages,* and paid a handsome premium in addition.

I should require to dip my pen in vitriol to do adequate justice to the unfairness of that soul-degrading system of apprenticeship. It was wrong—I still hold to it: it was wrong. But in those days the supply of embryo seamen was greater than the demand and shipowners of a disreputable stamp took advantage of the fact.

Such thoughts had no place in my young mind as I counted the laggard days until I was due to join my first ship. I believed the hour was not far distant when I should tread a proud quarter-deck in full glory of blue and gold, with a telescope under one arm and a speaking trumpet under the other, and the firmament was all too small to contain the splendour of my dreams.

My uniform arrived. Another actual sailor visited the town—that little place where everyone knew everyone else—and he, hearing that Frank Shaw was enlisted for the sea, came a-calling: moved, first by a generous and thoroughly sailor-like desire to be of assistance to a novice; second, I fear, by a natural longing to show off his knowledge of deep water.

He had made one lengthy windjammer voyage of three and a half years, without touching a home port; he was almost out of his time, notably bronzed, and magnificently tattooed as to wrists and hands. He confided pridefully to

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me that his bosom carried an Indian ink representation of a clipper ship in full sail, which should be displayed when opportunity offered—we later went to the swimming baths for a private view, and I remember that I thought him greater than Nelson, and almost as great as Clark Russell. He wore his ancient badged cap, all broken of peak, tarnished of gold lace, greasy and faded, on three hairs; magnificently he shredded tobacco from a sweating black plug, rolled it between his palms and filled an ancient and juicy pipe, which, being lighted, outraged the daylight. What a man! He'd seen the Lord's wonders a-many; afloat and ashore. A tattooist in Nagasaki had done the five-pointed star on his left hand; a girl in Ilo-Ilo had pricked the dragon on the right forearm. His talk passed lightly and scornfully from Good Hope to the Pribyloffs. Typhoons, tornadoes, cyclones, hurricanes and Southerly Busters he mentioned with tolerant contempt. And —I was to be another such as he! I'd posed before admiring servants as a figure of heroism; in Burrow's company I was well content to become a cipher and pipe a muter lay as I sat at his worthy feet acquiring knowledge.

"Now let's have a squint at your outfit," he said; "a tip or two might be useful."

Proudly I displayed the *pièce de résistance* of my equipment: the natty uniform cap bearing the company's house-flag in a golden wreath, its chinstay of gold cord complete, its peak shining. That cap had been my delight for days. God knows how many times I'd donned it, posed before the mirror, adjusted it, now formally, now rakishly, glorying in its distinction.

"What sort of sea-boots have you got?" Burrows asked, ignoring the cap to my sorrow. I produced them—enormous, thigh-high fishermen's boots of leather as thick and unyielding as a plank.

"Ah!" he said; "as soon as she slops a drop of water aboard you'll find yourself in the lee-scuppers with your head up against a stanchion! Swap 'em for rubbers or get 'em soled with rubber, you poor young devil!"

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"Lee-scuppers—stanchions"—the words rang like music. The real thing was drawing near—I smelt the salty tang of open water. But: my precious, precious sea-boots! They were my *toga virilis*: the hall-mark, the badge of my manhood! I'd clumped uncomfortably about the house in them to distraction's point, shaking the walls, stumbling with aching ankles, for the inch-thick leather refused to render; and now——!

Burrows delivered a sermon on the rigours of stormy weather. He pointed out that a ship in a gale was rather more lively than a pea on a hot shovel: that her decks were constantly swept by white water, that wet deck planking was much more slippery and treacherous than ice. He declared that, shod weightily, I should have no more chance of keeping my feet than an icicle in hell.

"I'm not afraid of a fall or two," I protested. I had played wing three-quarters at Rugger for two or three juvenile seasons.

"I was thinking of the ship," he said: the thoroughgoing sailorman. "When it's bad weather the ship needs all hands; when it's fine weather you don't need sea-boots."

"I can stand on the quarter-deck and shout orders!" I remonstrated. Curiously, the idea of being required to perform actual physical labour had never yet entered my head.

"A fat lot of shouting orders you'll do, young 'un! You'll work and you'll go on working; and when you feel you can't work any more, you'll still work. And if you're not all present and correct, someone will want to know why—with a rope's end." And then, for the good of my nebulous soul, he talked: talked of the craft of the sea as it showed to an apprentice, and not from the viewpoint of romantic fictionists. He spoke no word that was not true: indeed, he rather lightly glossed over the blacker spots, as my later experience went to show; and I shivered as I listened. He went through my choicely selected outfit detail by detail, approving here, condemning there. My oilskins deserved only to be burned, he said—though newly bought they were already rotten and

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leaky—old stuff pawned off by a soulless outfitter. So they proved—bitterly. He brushed a little gilt from the gingerbread of my enthusiasm, but not so much as he desired. And at the end: "They say the Corporation want navvies at the sewage works," he informed me. "Why don't you get a job there? It's ten times better than going to sea, I swear!" This was a repetition of the *Northcote's* boatswain's warning. There appeared to be a general plot on the part of all proved seafarers to deter aspirants. But I'd steeped myself in Marryat, Michael Scott and Clark Russell, and I flattered myself that I knew far more about the facts—in my own splendid mind—than any disillusioned veteran.

"Are you going to try for a job there?" I asked.

"What's the good?" he demanded. "After sticking out three and a half years of it, I might as well go the whole hog!"

And there, again, he was only true to type. The windjammer man of those nineteenth-century days had one never-failing motto: "Stick it out; good times coming soon."

In between giving advice and sage counsel whose value was above rubies, Burrows took liberties with my beloved badge-cap. He sat on it, he kicked it into the garden and encouraged my collie to worry it. He started an impromptu football match, indeed, with the beloved headgear as a ball. When finally retrieved it was a piteous wreck.

"They'll never take you for a first-voyager now," Burrows said. He meant it well, for he knew better than I the stigma that attaches itself to a first-voyager; but I surveyed the sorry relic and felt near to tears, but for the small matter of my recently attained manhood. Yet, there was a certain pride behind it all, too. Comparing my cap with his I traced a resemblance. Both were battered and worn and showed signs of hard usage.

"And you'll thank me for all this some day," he stated. I did. But I made no attempt to rid myself of those amazing sea-boots. I would rather have parted with the last drop of my life's blood, I think. They stood for hard weather, for

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reckless daredeviltry. Any adventurous-minded boy will understand what I mean. It's like handling the clandestine pistol: it opens the gates to high romance.

Burrows was recalled to his ship by reason of a strike amongst dock-labourers; and the apprentices, unpaid, were required to handle the cargo the well-paid dockers refused to touch. I have never set eyes on him since. Whether he be alive or dead I cannot tell; he deserved to live and prosper.

Further days crawled by: they seemed interminable; for the sea-fever was blazing in my veins. Time couldn't slip by quickly enough for my young enthusiasm. Now, when one wakens on a Sunday morning to smoke a cigarette and drink a cup of tea and discover that it is suddenly Saturday night again, one regrets the wastage of the splendid days.

A story that had aroused much mirth in my home circle was that of the youth who, on first going to sea, was presented with a handsome Bible; and promised to read it thoroughly, reverently and comprehensively. On his return from much travel he was asked if he had kept his promise. An affirmative following, the Bible was examined, and a neatly-folded five-pound note was discovered between the unturned pages. Ever since that story originated first-voyagers have carefully shaken their Bibles immediately after the final farewells!

My father must have had a heart of flesh and blood; for the Bible with which I was presented prior to leaving home, at a sumptuous supper arranged for my immediate chums, contained, indeed, the customary five pounds, but in honest chinking sovereigns, so that there should be no chance of their being overlooked, and no need for extra lies!

The order to join ship came somewhat suddenly. The Argosy of my future fortunes was lying at Antwerp, prior to sailing for the Colonies, and the owners strongly advised an immediate joining. I know now that they wanted another unpaid workman; I thought then that they sympathized with my desire to make a start, and that they had actually determined to quicken the ship's departure solely on that account. There was excitement, bustle and fuss, and then my

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father issued his magnificent decree: the family would cross over to the Continent and bid me God speed on my venture.

Deep down in my inmost heart, I was uncommonly thankful, for I secretly dreaded that ordeal of joining ship.

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CHAPTER III

THE FIRST SHIP

THE *Ravenby* was lying in dock in Antwerp, loading a cargo of coke for a South Australian port. She was a three-masted barque of 1,800 tons register, or thereabouts. She was built of steel, and, as Clark Russell would have said, as flat as a plank and as handsome as a manure heap. She had steel masts and lower yards, was rigged with wire in the most economical fashion, and was, in fact, a thrifty, dividend-earning, undermanned floating warehouse of a windjammer, whose object in life was to carry the maximum of cargo with the minimum of outlay. A wallowing, mankilling nightmare of a ship, she proved; but—to me, on first glimpsing her, she showed as an enticing cross between the *Victory*, the more superb of the old East Indiamen and a fabulous yacht, with a touch of the Blackwall Frigates to make all things complete.

Huddled in between a Red Star liner and a half-derelict Hartlepool tramp with Dutch canal barges here and there and a garbage boat close longside with the skipper's washing—and his wife's!—fluttering in the rigging in an intimate way, she might have struck the unromantic observer as something akin to sordid. For this was in the days before *crêpe-de-Chine* established itself as the only feminine wear! The lingerie of our skipper's wife was fashioned more for hard service than frivolous display. For myself, at first, I saw only tapering masts, spars that threaded a delicate tracery of beauty against the blue of a summer sky, only the poop, which I misnamed the quarterdeck—my official promenade; and recognized that at last the fulfilment of desire was come and that dreams were concrete things.

A grimy man, elastic-jawed over a quid of tobacco, shabbily-clad and unshaven, with a deadly trick of relieving his mouth of any overload of juice, spat into the scuppers

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—real scuppers!—and, answering inquiry, huskily admitted that the captain was aboard. I named him for some long-shore loafer who had sneaked over the bulwarks to cadge a meal from galley scraps; actually he was the first mate of the *Ravenby* and a person of unbelievable consequence. He eyed me possessively as I stood on the string-piece of the quay, resplendent in my new uniform.

"Come along, my man: give these ladies a hand aboard," I commanded sharply.

"Ay, ay, sir!" he replied, with a thickened chuckle; and clumsily touched the terrible bowler hat he wore. But there was blood in his eye if only I'd had the sense to recognize it: which I hadn't, inflated as I was with my own importance. He thrust a coaly plank from poop to string-piece and gallantly bade my mother to "Come on, lady." How was I to know that his heavy silver watch-chain was the badge of his authority and the token of his rank? I gave him a Belgian half-franc piece with a lordly gesture, and thereby bought a full three years' cordial hatred.

He swallowed hard; and his eyes, like parboiled onions, protruded alarmingly. I was given an imitation of an attack of apoplexy; but—but—I was sixteen years old and didn't know. He went chokedly to the companionway, shouted: "Visitors for the cap'n!" and disappeared, to assault the cook I imagine, or to make the foreman stevedore's existence a hell upon earth!

What had I expected in the captain of my ship, I wonder? Someone in white satin knee breeches, much gold lace, cocked hat and all the romantic et ceteras? I think so, for I'd forgotten the disillusionments of the *Northcote* long and long ago. I met a tall man in a rakish slouch hat clad in tweed —again of the pepper-and-salt pattern—his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and the dullness of afternoon sleep in his eyes. A harshvoiced, unsmiling Irishman from the vicinity of Belfast, who, to my conscious knowledge, never perpetrated a joke nor said a witty thing—not that I've met many sons of Erin who've acted up to the conceptions of the

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stage Irishman!—an iron-hard autocrat in the likeness of a plain-clothes policeman: such was the realization of my imaginings! He nodded to us, forgetting to uncover to my mother and sisters—and my father presented me as the newly-joined midshipman. Bless my soul, my father was infinitely more ignorant than even I in all matters appertaining to the sea.

"Ah—midshipman, you said—the midshipman—but who and what *are* ye?" rasped Captain Greegan.

My father, something of a diplomat in his way, tendered letters of introduction. He insisted on the midshipman element in the entire proceedings.

"Meanin' he's the new 'prentice lad?" growled my captain. "Well, he's got all his troubles before him, mark my word! Will the ladies take some refreshments?"

My mother replied that a cup of tea would appeal immensely.

"Cook's not aboard; I can give you some decent gin or rum, missis," Captain Greegan said scornfully. My forebears on both sides had been teetotallers for five generations; so the proffered hospitality was gently refused. It was a new world we had entered—and I saw my mother shudder as her imaginings of past days gripped her afresh and troubled her gentle soul. I know now that she thought she was delivering me, her Benjamin, over to the enemy, bound hand and foot.

"Well, come down below and have a look round, anyways," said the skipper, interrupting my learned discourse on ships and shipping to my sisters. I was pointing out that here on the poop I should stand and issue my orders to the crew to repel the attacks of Chinese pirates or something of that nature, I think!

We went below. The cabin of a tramping windjammer lying up in a home port, requires but little description from me. It was littered with stores, waiting to be struck below into lazarette and sail-locker. It stank of stale food and half-rotting vegetables. It was dirty and airless. There were bottles and glasses on the table and the remnants of a bread and cheese lunch. Let us leave it at that.

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My mother desired to see my cabin.

"Cabin!" almost gasped the skipper. And then: "Mr. Butchard!" he roared. A dapper young man, dungaree-clad, streaked blackly with coke-dust, presented himself. He apologized for his disorder, explaining that his immediate duty consisted in overseeing the stevedores whilst they stowed coke under the deck-beams.

"All swindlers, these foreigners; they'd do an archangel down!" the skipper interpolated. And then: "Show these people the half-deck, Mister. *This* is Shaw—new apprentice." He accented the pronoun somewhat derisively. My father must have experienced the same chill of disillusionment as that afflicting me.

"If the ship isn't due to sail immediately, should I be allowed to take Frank to Brussels and for a tour of Belgium?" he asked.

"Why not? She'll be lucky if she's ready to sail in a week; and who's going to cook for him, anyhow?" replied Captain Greegan. So then my spirits rose. Disillusionment was packed away into the obscurity of the illimitable future. A boy lives from day to day. We went on deck under escort of Butchard, who was the third mate and a time-expired apprentice, and a gentleman. I know now that he was pitying me: that he was genuinely sorry for me. He'd been through the mill himself!

"Here's the half-deck," he announced, opening the door of a twelve-foot square steel house on the main deck, for'ard of the after hatch.

"But—but people don't live in there!" my mother protested, aghast.

"I lived here four years," the third mate smiled. "You get used to it after a bit. Of course, it needs a bit of a clean-up; but it can be made very comfortable."

The pen—that's the best word for it—had been used as a dump for all imaginable and unimaginable refuse during the entire stay in port. The authorities would not permit galley-ashes and garbage to lie on deck or be thrown into the harbour: consequently everything had been deposited in the ap-

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prentices' quarters. Let your imagination picture the place; there are few words yet coined that could do it justice. It was a cesspool, neither more nor less. The *Ravenby* had recently discharged a full cargo of guano from the Lobos Islands, and certain perquisite sacks of that odorous necessity had been stowed in the half-deck until the mate, whose "pickings" they were, was able to dispose of them to advantage. Grease smeared the floor; undried mud topped the grease. Twelve feet square, six feet high: containing nothing whatsoever in the way of furnishings save two rows of shelves that were the apprentices' sleeping places, a few lockers that oozed great, greasy cockroaches, a bare plank table the colour of a decomposing corpse, that moved up and down on two upright stanchions, lighted from above by a cracked and canvassed skylight. This was the sumptuous sea-parlour to which I, the enthusiast, was condemned by the philanthropic owners, who had gleaned a large sum of hard-earned money from my unfortunate father.

"But—has he to live here alone?" tearfully asked my mother. "Oh, no: there'll be six or seven others to keep him company," smiled the third mate.

"In there!" rejoined my affrighted mother. She could not have expressed it better.

My father consulted his watch. "If we hurry we can catch the Brussels train," he observed. We hurried, and caught it. Just before we left I caught the mate's malignant glare.

"Who is that man?" I asked Butchard, who was trying to make an impression on my sister.

"Mr. Perkins, the chief officer!" he replied. Then I knew I'd done it with a vengeance! Seeing us over the side, Butchard took opportunity to whisper: "Try to persuade your old man to get your indentures broken; it's one hell of a life aboard this ship."

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CHAPTER IV

A SAILOR AT LAST

I WAS all of an itch to join ship, notwithstanding the gloomy warnings so freely administered; and so, instead of taking me with them to The Hague and further, my parents dropped me off the train at Antwerp station, and thus I was entirely on my own feet. A very lonely position, I decided: a throat-tightening, hot-eyed one, characterized mainly by an emptiness at the stomach-pit and a fluttering of the knees. So that my nautical swagger must have been but a pitiable sham as I found my solitary way from the station to dockland and the *Ravenby*.

The dockland of Antwerp being what it was then, I was promptly besieged by land-sharks, who scented fair game in me, though treating me with more caution than might otherwise have been the case if Burrows had not made my uniform cap an antique. They took me for a second-voyager: one who knew a little of his way about! Attractions, chiefly indecent, were lavishly offered. There were innumerable disreputable cafés; drink-shops galore; sorrowful sisters without end: all the vultures of sailortown seemed to be whetting their beaks in readiness to pick clean my succulent, innocent bones. A sailor ashore is fair game, more's the pity! He is the focus to which converges all the scum of the ports, false-faced, genial sharks who plan him naught but evil and destruction, and who'd as soon knife him as drink with him: who'd rid him of his last copeck and turn him over to the devils in human guise, who strip him and shanghai him aboard the handiest outward-bounder. The average sailorman, being a fairly decent fellow at heart, it seems a pity that Nature should imbue him with childlike idiocy as soon as he sets foot ashore.

Antwerp of that day had the unenviable reputation of

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being the sink of all Northern European ports. Sailing ships by the score flocked there to discharge their cargoes after voyages of two or three years' duration; and even with the starvation wages paid in those days to the deckhand, each ship's company's joint pay represented something like a thousand pounds, and very often much more than that. Fair loot, this, for the dock-side pirates.

What the vendors of spurious jewellery, the patrons of drinking-dens, and the sneaking guides didn't get, the Dolly Mops did. Foul things were done in the ill-lit side-streets: stabbed bodies, stripped nude, were not infrequently found floating in the muddy Scheldt. Shanghaiing still persisted: ship after noble ship put to sea manned by drink-sodden, diseased crews, who could not stir a hand to help themselves until the runners deserted them in the tug off Flushing, and who only then awakened to the reality that advance pay-notes, representing a full month's worth of their bitterly-earned wages, had been taken by the foul bullies who had doped them and turned them adrift to endure the rigours of a four-month passage, with practically only the befouled clothing in which they had been pitched aboard to bless themselves with.

The system was wrong, not the sailors themselves. When a man joined a sailing-ship he signed articles to serve aboard her until she returned to a port between the Elbe and Brest, or until she had been absent for a period of full three years. He drew, or had drawn for him, one month's pay prior to sailing. If married, he could leave a half-pay note behind, entitling his wife to collect half his earnings as they fell due. I cannot remember meeting more than one married foremast-hand during all my years in sail; and he was a Partick riveter who had been shanghaied!

After a four-months' passage, the ship arriving at a foreign port, as an act of grace—there being no compulsion in the matter at all—the captain might dole out half a crown apiece to each member of the crew on Saturday nights. Similarly in the next port and the next. The wages accumulated

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under these conditions. Beyond buying tobacco, soap and matches, and a few tawdry clothes from the ship's slop-chest, the men had no opportunity to use money at sea. In ports abroad plenty of opportunity, but no money! One supposes the owners must have profited by these delayed wages?

At sea drink was never served, save once or twice during a hard-weather passage, when there'd been an all-hands' job aloft in a blizzard. The regular daily ration of rum which is such a feature of the Royal Navy was non-existent under the Red Ensign. The men, on the homeward passage, regaled themselves with recitals of the honest drinks they would have when paid off. Very wrong, my pious readers, very wrong indeed, but very human! The deep-water shellback of the nineteenth century knew practically nothing of any port of all the Seven Seas save its public-houses, for he was a nomad, with no settled abiding-place, and as he very seldom returned to the port whence he had sailed, he was without permanent friends. Scant opportunity had he, a stranger, to make worth-while friends on his return with much money. The drink-den was the one place where he might meet his kind, and the house of ill-fame the only establishment where he could associate with one of the opposite sex without an introduction —and who was to introduce him, a semi-pariah, to women of good repute, after a three years' severance from feminine intercourse?

Let us be honest in the matter. A man leading the hard, clean existence of the windjammer sailor, owned passions the same as landsmen, who could marry when they willed. But what respectable woman would marry a deep-water sailor of that time: knowing herself foredoomed to grasswidowhood for years at a stretch, and required to exist on the half of two pounds or two-ten a month? Not many, I warrant. Merchant Jack, being essentially human, craved feminine society after endless months of monastic seclusion, and he found it in the brothels, if the crimps and other vermin who battened on him when the ship arrived at her paying-off port permitted him to get so far.

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Observe the procedure when the ship arrived at her paying-off port: citing Antwerp as a case in point. The land called to the ship-bound sailor as green grass calls to the stall-fed colt. It was a place of romance and adventure: a place where the overtight bonds of discipline might be relaxed for a little breathing-space. He'd be his own master, as good as the next fellow. He was all eagerness to set foot ashore, to eat food different from eternal salt-horse and flinty biscuit. As likely as not, by the time his ship was docked and the mate pronounced the order of release: "That'll do, the hands!" it was too late for the captain to proceed ashore to secure sufficient money to give each man an earnest of the wages due to him.

The shore-ghouls knew it to their profit. They flocked aboard the ship as she arrived, with none to gainsay them. They waited until the last mooring chain was secured, and proceeded to work. Each worn and land-hungry shellback was greeted with smiles and handclasps.

"You remember me, Yack, eh?"—that sort of thing. "Don't forget an old pal, Yack!"

God bless my soul, Jack, at that stage of the proceedings, would have remembered an escaped murderer, considering how the shore-fret raced in his blood! He was at last among friends—hearty, high-toned friends, smartly dressed, flashing solid gold watch-chains—Jack's standard of gentility was assessed by the magnificence of a man's watch-chain!—clean-collared men, these, with shining boots and hard hats. And each one of these welcoming friends had at least one bottle of rot-gut liquor in his pocket; very probably more. Each one was eager in his proffer of money moreover: "Yoost a quid, Yack, till pay-off, eh!" Good investments, these lavishly-offered pounds: returning an interest of a hundred, perhaps a thousand, per cent. in twenty-four hours; profit to make the professional moneylender grind his teeth with envy.

Forecastle Jack, in a mood to take anything that was offered, and, an honourable man, aware that he was able to repay all obligations whether of money or kind, with interest

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inside a day, took a drink. His mentality, save in such matters as duty and the ability to fight to the bitter end for the life of a ship, was that of a child. He scented no harm. He took a drink from the first bottle thrust into his hand, and thenceforward was the irreclaimable property of the successful drink-giver. Maybe the liquor was doped; though, being fixed-bayonet stuff originally, doping was hardly necessary to render it more poisonous: anyhow, it established a desire for another drink and then another. It aroused the thirsty soul of the man who, for years, had worked under conditions and in a fashion that would have driven the most honest of to-day's trade unionists into downright Bolshevism, and the Naval rating of even that day into open mutiny, as expressed by the throwing overboard of gunsights.

Liking the taste of the fiery brew, Jack had another drink on an empty stomach that had not sampled alcohol for months. Then he washed himself. He was already shaved, and had laid out his shore-going clothes whilst the ship was towing up-river to the dock-gates. Washed and dressed, he naturally indulged in another free draught of the salty, thirst-evoking poison; afterwards he borrowed a sovereign like a lord, and went ashore, arm in arm with the first man who grabbed him: this being, by crimp-law, the man who gave him the initial bottle to sample. What chance has a sheep among wolves, or a dove amongst carrion crows? A better chance than Windjammer Jack had amongst these trained bandits, who had allies everywhere, ready to seduce a man to his moral ruin or slip a knife between his ribs should he prove obstreperous. Once ashore, Jack was piloted here and there—always amongst genial souls and complaisant bodies. Not yet was he ripe for the plucking: but the bait was skilfully laid. When he wakened next morning in the stifling backroom of some dubious *café chantant*, or, more likely still, in some more disreputable environment, he remembered that it was paying-off day. He made shift to work an erratic course to the shipping office, having ascertained the hour of his formal release from servitude. Before signing-off he was plied

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with liquor by his overnight friends, and rendered mellow and amenable to treatment. Paid off, with forty, fifty, might be sixty, pounds in his possession, his cross, that was all his signature necessary, penned against his name in the articles in token of full satisfaction with his pay and discharge, and his leaving certificate in order, he moved towards the door. His first thought was to repay his loan of overnight, to treat his associate as handsomely as he had been treated. From the misty sea of faces clustered outside the office door—they've altered things now, I'm told—he singled out his guide and counsellor.

"Oh, that's all right, Yack—plenty of time. Have little drink wiz me—good pals, eh? I ben a shellback myselfs." So there you are. And you, who have probably never been out of sight or hearing of an honest, stolid British constable in your lives, you, who know that if aught offend you, you have but to consult your solicitor; you, whose soul is harrowed to its deeps by a chattering windowframe on a windy night; you, who can telephone your wine-merchant to be sure that the next wine supplied must be of first-rate quality; you, who engage a guide from Cook's or Lunn's if you stray a foot beyond your national borders—you venture to point the finger of scorn at Windjammer Jack, by whose labours your gaping stomachs were filled in your youth! Pah, don't be hypocrites, for pity's sake! Merchant Jack of my day companioned with wantons did he? Maybe; but honest girls were none the worse for him, for in his simple creed were two cleanly-drawn categories: decent women and the others, and he was too humble-minded to look with desire upon the decent ones!

It may be asked, why didn't Jack take advantage of the various Sailors' Homes, and similar institutions? Certainly: why didn't he? Because those excellent establishments savoured just a little too much of the *Institution;* there was even an atmosphere of tolerant charity in their severe dimensions: the suggestion of a ship's forecastle, say: with a vague hint that somewhere behind it all lurked psalm-singing

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and prayer-meetings, and brands snatched from the burning —excellent things in their time and place, as on the poop of a Bethel ship in Coquimbo, say—but something to shy at so long as the munificent pay-day lasted. Anyhow, who, on being released from Portland, would, for choice, spend his holidays at Pentonville?

It was amongst such a group of sailors' soul-killers that I found myself as I wended my way from Antwerp station to Antwerp docks: a romantic youth, untutored by a too-shy father in the knowledge of my sex.

God knows what the end of it might have been: the flattery of the wily ones—"It is easy to see you know your way about, young feller!"—"No chance of mistaking you for a sucker!" —and that sort of unctuous stuff, went to my head. Light music sounded from behind half-closed doors, there was light laughter; too-fair faces smiled invitation.

The vital happenings of life seldom occur with dramatic effect, I have found. Destiny never served an apprenticeship to play-writing, of that I am sure. But for once a dramatic moment came my way.

"You're from the *Ravenby,* aren't you?" asked a voice. "Best hang on to me, young fellow my lad." Thus I met Chamberlain for the first time.

He knew me, it transpired—imagine my wonderment at my very ship being named!—by the Company's houseflag on my cap, which matched his own badge. Only one of the "Sorrow and Starvation Line" ships happened to be in Antwerp at the time! it was all quite simple, but at the moment to me it bordered on the miraculous. An older fellow than I, he was—a third-voyager, indeed. To me he appeared a full-grown man, and everything a ship's captain ought to be. Actually, he was one of the senior apprentices of the *Ravenby,* sharing that honour with Toby Elliott and Tottie Winder, whom I was to meet later. As a sixteen-year-old boy is by instinct a hero-worshipper, I naturally commenced an idolatry that has not ceased to this day. Chamberlain came up to all my preconceived standards. He had a trick of handling that

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pack of hungry wolves when they showed a disposition to resent his salvage work. There was no actual fighting, mark you—but a broad hint that there *might* be fighting if circumstances demanded. "Measured speech and ordered action," and the "island devil calmly curbed"; but just enough of a snap in his words, just a hint of a gleam in his eyes as he tucked his hand beneath my elbow and began to pilot me, the rescued lamb, to a fair haven, to convince. It was well for me, I think, that my first day as an actual sailor found me shelter under such a protective lee. He took me through the greedy pack as a regular cruiser might have escorted a tramp through a swarm of snarling pirates.

"Where are you going, young 'un?" was his first question, once the sharks had retired, hungry and dismayed.

"Down on board the ship to report," said I, feeling the youngest thing on earth. For I knew at once, by his lean, amused face, that he had me sized up as a first-voyager, notwithstanding the elaborate camouflage of the dirtied cap. And I knew, too, that the fulsome flatteries of the dispersed pimps were false: they hadn't been hoodwinked for a moment. Yes, "young 'un" was right.

"Take my tip, and don't," he said. "Old Perks has got a lot of blood in his eye to-day. Supper-time's early enough for reporting." Being full of zeal, I said I considered I ought to report my arrival. Secretly I knew I wanted to get to work at my dreamed-of poop-pacing and telescope-squinting, cutting a sailorly figure before admiring eyes.

"More damned fool you, if you do!" said he. "You poor young devil! What do you want to come to sea for? Got a boozy father, or something?" I tried to explain, somewhat aghast. What could it mean, was the recurrent thought in my puzzled mind: everyone who had to do with the sea preached a gospel against it? There was never a trace of variation in the discordant note!

"What's wrong with going to sea?" I asked.

"Wait a bit; you'll soon know," retorted he darkly. "Let's go somewhere where we needn't look at a ship."

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Of course I accompanied him, still feeling excruciatingly young. We left the swinging cranes and crashing coaltrucks of Dockland, dodged the shunting railway wagons—all marked up: "8 chevaux: 40 hommes"—a label with which I was to grow sickeningly familiar in later years—through coal and coke-dust, the noise and heat and grime of a busy port; and so to a square, where the Anversois sat at their comfortable ease, imbibing notable bocks. A military band was playing: promenaders circled the bandstand: one dapper officer in black and gold and crimson, hardly bigger than his own sword, astonished me by his lively eloquence. He was escorting a girl round and round, and he was talking: not only with his lips, but with his hands, eyes, eyebrows, and shoulders and elbows, with sudden stamps of his feet to punctuate his half-breathless sentences: with a hitch of his Gargantuan sword to add emphasis, with an occasional slap on the top of his *képi* by way of accentuation. The man was, in a word, an embodied monologue.

"Terrible gas-bags, these foreigners!" Chamberlain said. "Have a drink?"

We sat down under an awning amongst the respectable bourgeoisie. He ordered a bock, I a lemonade. And then, the spirit moving him, he commenced to talk, and golden talk it was. He commenced by fluently cursing the sea, the ships upon it and all who manned such ships. Oh, he was no saint, this youthful hero of mine! Particularly did he curse the *Ravenby* and her owners: especially the owners, for a workhouse-bred crew of poisonous slave-drivers. Most particularly did he curse Mr. Perkins, chief mate of the *Ravenby*. I listened, awed. This was not the coarse, torrential, senseless cursing of the *Northcote's* boatswain, which had simply been volleyed filth. This was artistic, comprehensive, and occasionally humorous, carefully-thought-out profanity, gentlemanly, and enunciated with the power of a trained elocutionist.

And the reason? He had a weakness for falling in love, not with every pretty face he saw by any means, but dis-

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criminately; and always so long as the attack persisted, very, very sincerely. He had a trick of placing his inamoratas on lofty pedestals, too—all his geese were swans. He was very human. And he'd left a girl behind in England! He, feeling a need for expression, tried to explain her to me. She was a composite of Venus, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Beatrice, and a few others. There's no doubt about it: he was simply aching with adoration. Equally so, he ached with adoration of other girls, and always quite sincerely. And he'd been required to leave this pearl of great price and come back to the poisonous sea! No; there was no engagement, no understanding, even: her parents somehow didn't approve of him.

"And there's a swine of a brother of mine—I've got a dozen—just home on leave—he's in the Navy—who'll make all the running now! He told me that I'd got a smattering of the lower deck about me when I told him I'd punch his head if he trespassed. One of your haughty kind, Shaw—regular Navy—Navy breed!"

For myself, I could not understand his agitation—over a girl! I who had constantly fled down side streets to avoid females of my family's acquaintance, could not conceive any man caring the snap of the fingers for any girl alive.

"That's a jolly pretty girl over there, though!" Chamberlain said after another bock; and he brightened up. "Beware of women, Shaw: they're the very devil; they play merry hell with a man!" And he endeavoured to get my views on the subject—of which I had none, except that I thought all girls, sisters excepted, were rotten.

"You'll change," he gloomed. "Wait till you've made a four months' passage without seeing one!" Then he spotted a respectable Fleming with a portentous walrus moustache, which seemed to contain the debris of forgotten meals.

"I swear that squarehead's the dead-spit image of old Perks!" he burst out, and recommenced cursing the *Ravenby's* mate, explaining between the torrents that Mr. Perkins and he had been rivals for the favour of the same girl in Sydney the previous voyage, and that he, Chamberlain, had

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been successful: so successful, indeed, that during the homeward passage the mate had missed no single opportunity of "rubbing it in" to him for all he was worth.

"Coarse-minded old cow's son, Perks," he ended. "Got the soul of a louse." At once the champion of my new-found friend, I mentioned that I had offered Mr. Perkins a tip. After recovering from his awed amazement:

"You and I'll have to hang together this trip, I fancy," he said. "Tipped old Perks, did you? Oh, my God!" And, the splendour of the thing gripping him, he solemnly shook hands and that sealed a friendship that, as the months proved, was of incalculable value to me, in countless ways. For, if I were a hero-worshipper born, he was a natural protector, a champion of lost causes: wont to run himself into endless trouble and ill-odour for the sake of shielding and assisting one less favourably situated than himself. I wish I could have given as much as I got out of that friendship. There was a time that he pawned his sea-boots—a sailor's most valued possessions—to pay a fine imposed on me for assaulting a Chilean *vigilante*—however, that is not a very creditable story.

After a time we joined the circulating, chattering throng about the bandstand: notably superior to them all, in our splendid imagination, by reason of our British heritage, for we were both young enough to be intolerant of all foreigners: and during our perambulation, Chamberlain, mellowed by bock, talked wisely of the way of the sea and the ports that fringe it. He ridded my mind, with verbal cuts as clean as those of the surgeon's knife, of many false glamours. Undoubtedly he painted the picture in sombre colours; but he was a disillusioned man who'd been through the whole grim grind for over three years and saw no need to affect a state of feeling that wasn't genuine. What tinctured his soul with bitterness, too, was the fact that he must needs go through the purgatory for yet another voyage, possibly—for no living soul as yet knew whither the *Ravenby* would be sent after delivering her initial cargo—for another three years. "And

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my time'll be up in another eight months!" he brooded. "See me serving as an A.B. on two pounds a month for ever and ever, amen. And that girl waiting at home, what's more!" He studied over that for a while, and then: "That is, if she is waiting, damn that brother of mine!"

Going to sea, it appeared, was not a matter of gold lace and telescopes at all. It was sheer hard work of the grimmest kind, starting at midnight and continuing until the next midnight and so *ad infinitum*. And there was no get-out from it, until the period of your indentures expired, that was the enduring hell of it. If you deserted you forfeited all the time you'd already served: the prime of your years; and you could be hunted down like a common criminal and taken back aboard your ship by policemen! If, during your apprenticeship, you annoyed your captain or caused him to dislike you in any way, all the worse for you. For it was the captain's reference that was looked at when you went up for your Board of Trade Examination for second mate's ticket. If that commander's reference were unfavourable—as it might easily be—back you had to go to sea for a full year, until you won a testimonial more to the examiners' liking. If, on account of the grinding tyranny that such an autocrat as a sailing ship skipper can exercise, you complained to the owners, you got no sympathy, instead they translated your complaint to the captain and you found a tightening up of discipline that was already bar-tight, and the old man rubbed it in until you couldn't call your soul your own!

"But what sort of work?" I asked, fastening on to the reiterated word. "Going up the masts and fastening the sails?"

"Oh, my God; you don't go up the masts; you go aloft! And you don't fasten sails; you hand the canvas and make fast the topsails. Have you ever seen a ship before?"

I proudly announced that I had made a deep-water voyage when I was eleven years of age; a *deep-water* voyage.

"In a steamer, of course? Wait a bit; you'll see. By work, I mean holystoning decks and shovelling coal and guano for

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twelve blessed hours a day; chipping cables and handling the patent scrubber; scraping out the pig-pens and working cargo when everyone else has gone on strike. Being an apprentice you *can't* go on strike: they've made certain of that. Going aloft isn't *work;* it's playtime."

"Watching the men do it properly, you mean?" was my naïve query. Then he laughed, sensing I'd culled my experience from Clark Russell and Captain Marryat.

"Have you any money?" he asked. I pulled out a sovereign with some pride. The rest were locked away in my sea-chest aboard the ship.

"Go and buy a passage home—hook it before it's too late," Chamberlain advised. But of course I didn't, because I disbelieved nine-tenths of what he told me. I thought he was coming "the old-timer" over me; pulling my leg. Actually he understated the fact, as I was soon to learn.

Poor Chamberlain! "Joe" he naturally was to everybody; it was inevitable. He was a fine sword thrust into an unworthy sheath, purely by force of circumstances. At home he was the ugly duckling: for his was a Royal Navy family and had been so from time immemorial. His father—sire of a full score sons and daughters—was a retired Paymaster, R.N. His grandfather had commanded the first British steam battleship. His great-grandfather had made himself a terror to French privateers in the English Channel—so it went back down the salty ages of history, the name sounding like a trumpet-blast. All his brothers held commissions or appointments in the Navy; and how the retired Paymaster managed it I do not know on his means; his sisters were either engaged or married to naval officers. "Joe"—at home he was "Joe III"—had tried, first for the *Britannia,* next for the paymaster branch, and then for the engineering side—and always he had failed, in spite of the best efforts of painstaking crammers. And the possibilities of working up from the lower deck to a commission in the Service were so remote as to be negligible. For the Navy was then, as the Navy is now—as it was during the Great War, so I found when serving in

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it—the most conservative and most jealous of all the services.

So my "Joe" must needs come into the merchant service, with the intention of securing a Naval Reserve commission at the appointed time, and thus winning into the only worthwhile service—his view of it—by means of the Supplementary List, or the Hungry Hundred.

But hell being hell, there seemed nothing else to do save pace its glowing floors with as much equanimity as one could command; so waiting for the hour when work was ended, we steered a course for the *Ravenby* and the glamour of the sea.

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CHAPTER V

THE FIRST DAY

To this day, after a lapse of thirty years, I retain vivid recollection of the malignity of Mr. Perkin's face as Joe Chamberlain and myself made for the gangplank of what was to be my home for the best part of four strenuous years. He was a reddish-faced man, with a purplish hint about his cheeks and a bulbous nose, he owned protruding eyes and a notable walrus moustache. I got an impression that he had been melted and poured into his garments, and that if he stooped something vital would inevitably carry away. He was addicted to the tobacco-chewing habit—which probably matches with deep-sea garments, but appears a trifle incongruous when pursued in shore-going attire. His face shone greasily, and he wore an iron-hard felt hat of grotesque fashion: dating back, so it appeared, through countless generations. His mighty watch-chain, stout enough to moor the *Ravenby* in a Valparaiso Norther, was tastefully displayed across an imposing abdomen; and the silver compass encased in a miniature ship's wheel, that depended therefrom, swung nobly in space. His suit might have been hewn from solid indigo with a blunt ax. Withal, as the months were to prove, he was an almost perfect seaman and ship's husband: courageous and resourceful in the most impossible circumstances, and absolutely untiring during the fiercest spells of bad weather. He was a slave-driver, and a good deal of a bully when he fancied he could get away with it; but the conditions of his service had made him so; for it had been his task since early manhood to achieve impossibilities with indifferent material. He was a soured and disappointed man, compelled to serve in a subordinate capacity under a captain younger and less experienced than himself for two reasons.

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One was that he had never contrived to qualify as a master-mariner—so far as examinations were concerned; the other, a partiality for liquor. Probably the two limitations reacted one upon another.

Chamberlain, as senior, got the first blast of his wrath; and I beheld my Admirable Crichton subjected to foulnesses that curdled my Methodist blood. Bound by discipline, Joe made no retort, but meekly bowed his head before the hurricane. I should have admired him more, then, if he had retaliated with words, even blows; now I admire him for his excellent restraint. For if he had retorted, I, the new fellow, taken under his wing must have suffered some measure of the resulting penalty. He could, as he afterwards proved, have battered stout and drink-softened Perkins into a shapeless jelly; he could have outsworn him, though using a verbal rapier instead of a bludgeon; but he crossed the gangway docilely, and as the mate fetched his breath for fresh vituperations he quickly said: "I told Shaw there was no need to come down aboard; he wanted very much to come, sir—straight away."

Mr. Perkins purpled, and having no new curses he repeated the old ones. He would teach us a lesson, he said. All the cabin stores waiting to be embarked, and we'd neglected our duty! If it had not been for the fact that the shore warehouses were closed for the night, he'd turn us to then and there and keep us on humping stores until the job was done. As it was—"You take nightwatchman's duty on as from to-night, Chamberlain!" he said bitterly. And then old wounds apparently irking: "See how you get on with the girls now!"

Then he returned his attention to me. "You get her swept down, my gilt-edged mother's darling! Clean the decks and see if you'll be so ready with your——tips when you're finished! Get a move on, Mister Midshipman Frankie darling, or I'll want to know the reason why. And whilst you're doing it, think what your precious mother would think if she saw you doing it!" He was of coarse fibre, always anxious to hurt; though denied by sea-law the privilege of actual blows. All

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through my service with him I found that he possessed a quality of hurting a man on his rawest spot. My affection for my mother was, and still is, a treasured possession; and he'd sensed it. In the foulest language he criticized my mother's appearance and manner, mimicking her consternation and surprise and, yes—her disgust. He went on to sneer at my father, moreover. Although young I was a pretty husky animal: so I started in to wipe out Mr. Perkin's aspersions in a good round hand; but Chamberlain caught me back and pitched me into the half-deck. I didn't know then the heinousness of violence towards a superior officer in the merchant service. Nor did I understand the injustice that permitted such superiors to heap wordy garbage on everything held most sacred by a subordinate, *so long as no physical violence was employed.* The mere touch of a hand that might be magnified into a blow was forbidden, unless the subordinate hit first; but there was no such law regarding insults that might sting worse than many blows. And woe betide the man who should so far remember his natural feelings as to have recourse to the avenging smite!

I don't know how long this would have gone on but for Butchard, the third mate, who appeared from the cabin door, ready dressed for the shore. A very different type of man from Perkins—a gentleman, son of a shipowner qualifying in sail to command one of his father's steamers—he was sprucely attired, with scant suggestion of the sailor about him. Being a shipowner's son, it behoved both captain and mate of the *Ravenby* to keep on good terms with him, of course, in case his father chanced to have any lucrative berths going a-begging; but in addition to this qualification Butchard possessed a decided personality of his own, and though almost a pygmy in stature, had a quiet forceful manner that impressed bigger-bodied, smaller-souled men than himself.

"Well—ready for the beach, sir?" he asked. "Hallo, Joe—you back?" He shook hands with Chamberlain and grinned cheerfully at me, and knowing well enough all that had transpired, he turned to the gangway, standing aside for the mate

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to precede him. There being nothing else for it Mr. Perkins went ashore, rumbling with wrath.

Chamberlain sat down on the high sill of the half-deck door and thrust his hands deeply into his pockets.

"Well, how d'you think you'll like going to sea?" he demanded. I was literally stunned by the lacerating, needless brutality of it all. Blows are bad, but words can inflict more poignant hurts than any blows to anyone of a sensitive disposition, as most boys fresh from home are. I had nothing to say—but Chamberlain said all I might have said, and infinitely more: so that his past outburst in the café ashore sounded by comparison like the page of a Sunday-school reader. I could only admire and envy! And then he broke off in the middle of a cumulative summary of our chief officer's ancestry, to throw back his head and laugh.

"He hasn't forgotten that girl in Sydney even yet!" he said, rocking to and fro. "I'm one up on him still." Then he vowed to cut Mr. Perkins out in whatsoever amorous adventure he might engage.

"I know where to hurt the swab," he said, though "swab" was not the word he used; and he did, for our would-be "bucko" mate had one most vulnerable spot in his armour, and that was his overweening vanity. It was the firm conviction of this fifty-year-old Don Juan that he was irresistible where women were concerned. He believed himself capable of storming the citadel of any woman's heart. He was cock of a midden, of course, for few of a crew would attempt to enter the lists with so doughty and formidable a rival. What—cross swords with a chief mate, who could make life an enduring hell afloat for the transgressor! But the hardy desperado who snatched a prize from under Lothario Perkin's possessive eye would inflict a stinging wound! In the aftertime Joe faithfully fulfilled his promise, as may be told. Meanwhile, there was the present to be considered.

"Did he really mean I was to sweep the decks?" I asked.

"Of course he did. I'll help, though: might as well since the swine's made me night watchman, in a home port, too!

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No more going ashore for me now, when Toby and Jeffcot join up!" That called for a fresh, lingering outburst that must have shocked many Victorian ears; but Joe was a human sailor, and no varnished saint.

Before tackling the task he changed into well-washed dungarees, and advised me to do the same. Dungarees were part of my outfit, of course: but I hadn't the remotest idea to what use they were likely to be put. I proceeded to search for them: Chamberlain taking a friendly interest in the contents of my sea-chest. Certain articles he approved of; certain others he scoffed at. Navigation books, a box of drawing instruments, a piccolo which I could play but indifferently, and other such oddments, he said, would come in handy for pawning abroad. My shirts were of too fine a quality; and as I mentioned that my mother had made them, he said that he would see to it that I looked after them properly.

As for his own present outfit, he had simply gone the rounds at home and confiscated all the worn undergear and overgear he could lay hands on—size, pattern, and colouring mattered nothing at all. I doubt if his sea chest contained a single new article, for he was wise in the way of the sea. He carefully shook my Bible—just in case; but, alas! without result. When I suggested a similar procedure as concerned his own, he said: "No such luck; my pater hadn't any fivers to throw away on this perishing shellback!" But he admitted that my outfit was an improvement on his own original equipment, which had been secured through one of the most notorious of the flat-catching sharks and proved to be practically worthless.

Changed into working rig, we got brooms from a locker for'ard and swept the decks down. I had never handled a broom before, and I finished my share of the job with only a little skin on my palms: then Joe swept down my side of the deck all over again.

By this time we were rarely hungry. The half-deck had been ridded of its previous noisome contents: I believe the mate himself had performed that task and so driven another

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nail into the coffin of his hatred of premium apprentices; but I thought it a cheerless apartment enough.

"What time will the steward bring supper?" I wanted to know.

"In four or five years, if you're lucky: when you're an officer. Stewards don't attend to gentlemen apprentices, who are berthed and messed aft, under kind, Christian captains who take an interest in teaching the cadets navigation," said Joe, evidently quoting verbatim from some specious advertisement that had trapped him.

"What do we do for meals, then?"

"Go to the galley and suck up to the cook and see what happens." So I commenced my first "Peggy." My school had not been a fagging school and I was new to the task of waiting either on myself or on others. But I looked for a tray and found none. A somewhat grimy box on the deck with the handle across its open top made no appeal to me, until Joe kicked it in my direction.

"Best get the bread barge filled whilst you're about it," he suggested. All Greek to me, of course! But I picked up the box. I knew where the galley was, certainly, because I'd swept a little of refuse from its doorway a little while before; but so far I'd seen no cook. He had been ashore having a drink, in company with the steward. As I passed over the doorsill, a monstrous mulatto with side-whiskers, resplendent in a stiff white shirt and an extremely dirty apron, descended the poopladder. He was almost a Sambo, although he prided himself on the white blood that ran in his veins. I'd been accustomed to look upon black people as more or less slaves, so consequently, when this dark-hued magnificence shouted: "Hi! you boy, dar! Was yu de new bo-oy?" I naturally felt the prickles rise.

"I'm the newly joined cadet," said I with dignity. He laughed at that, and I told him not to laugh at me any more, because I didn't intend to be laughed at by a sniggering nigger. It was the "nigger" that got his ire!

"What yo' calls nigger, yo' common white trash?" he de-

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manded, and clouted me into the scuppers. My Yorkshire blood afire, I got up and went for him—not caring overmuch if he happened to be commodore of the fleet. Of course, I came off second-best, and might have suffered more if Joe had not interfered and threatened to kick the steward's shins into a jelly. For this was the steward; and I'd made yet another blunder in antagonizing the one man on shipboard who had it in his power to ease the apprentice's hard lot. However, he didn't bear malice; bless his heart, I won him over later on Joe's suggestion, with a screamingly gaudy belt that had somehow got into my outfit, and of which the mulatto steward was as proud as a bride is of her wedding bouquet. He was a famous pugilist, it afterwards transpired; so I hadn't anything to be ashamed of in allowing him to beat me in our breathless encounter. Once peace was restored and explanations made:

"Yo' wants yo' supper?" he asked me out of a swelling mouth. I'd got one jab home! "Den foller me!" And he stalked majestically for'ard with the premium apprentice meekly following in his lordly wake. Many a time afterwards, in Australia, I assisted him aboard, so intoxicated that he couldn't tell the *Ravenby* from a summer's dawning. For that was my teetotal lot, during early years: always to retrieve drunks! And the argument is against temperance, I've sometimes thought; the sober men get all the dirty work to do!

The cook was a Yorkshireman from Bradford, by all the gods! and, talk of coincidence—a thing editors are apt to disbelieve—of my own name. Scots can be clannish on occasion, I have heard; but we two West Riding tikes gave them points. Once he knew my name, he roamed back into muddy dregs of ancestry to prove relationship. When I discovered, as I very soon did, the incalculable worth of standing well with the "Doctor" I, showing evidence of an astuteness that has failed me in more vital situations, created, entirely out of my own head, a line of collateral ancestors that completely satisfied the god of the galley of a near relationship. I bene-

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fited; oh, yes, I benefited, like the trencher-scraper hound I was, but—it was a creed of self-defence. Evidently at sixteen I betrayed some knowledge of the uses of fiction! Not that all this was done immediately. My immediate task was to get grub for two hungry apprentices. The steward ordained that, as a special act of grace, Joe and I should eat the crumbs of the cabin table—but I was solemnly warned not to expect similar concessions in future. In consequence a slab of salt-meat hash that stank to high heaven was slapped on to a greasy tin kit; a topless butter-tin with a strand of wire rope for a handle was filled with pungent black tea—and that was all.

"Yes; but I was told to fetch the supper!" I protested.

"Yo' foller me aft to de cabin; I gib yo' bread," the steward promised. "Dey ain't no small stores unpacked anyways; and I don' whack 'em out in no case till de rest ob de byes jines ship." Then he found fault with the cook: first for being dirty; next for being drunk, which he wasn't—quite! The argument waxed hot. The cook baled a dipperful of boiling water from a copper on the stove and launched it at the mulatto. The steward seized the cleaver and vowed he'd have the cook's liver for a sample of yellow meat: the cook snatched the terrible prod that is used for handling meat in bulk—two mighty prongs and an evil hook at the end of a thirty-inch steel shaft—and I scented blood: blood in bucketfuls! However, it was all bluster, and culminated in the two worthies going ashore arm in arm for liquid refreshments; their aprons rolled to their waists, and the cook wearing a duplicate of Mr. Perkin's hard hat. For myself, I carried tea and hash to the half-deck, and wished and wished I was at home again. Sniffing the hash, tasting the tea, Joe revolted. This wasn't a white man's meal! The hash, even to my hungry palate, was disgusting; the tea was black as ink, unsweetened, unlaced with milk and bitter as gall.

"Come on down aft and we'll see if that black swine's left anything lying about," said Joe. Down aft we went: but the crafty darky had locked his pantry and removed the key;

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and though the cabin floor was littered with consumable stores, nothing as yet had been broached. We tried everywhere. In the mate's unfastened room was a half emptied grog bottle, and Joe had a long swig.

"First drink I've ever had with old Perks, and he'd be a sick man if he knew," said he. Then we doctored the bottle with certain evil matters, and returned in good order but still unsatisfied to our own abode.

I thought of the shining table at home, groaning under an appetizing load. Joe's advice *re* catching the evening packet to England seemed sound. But—how dared I face my chums, before whom I'd boasted of the mighty deeds I should perform? They'd call me a funk and many other things. But the money that would buy me my fare to England and ease, would also—would—also——

"Come on land," said I; "and we'll buy a proper meal." If it hadn't been for the mate's whisky, maybe Joe would have remembered his duty as night-watchman. As it was—we went ashore; just as we were, in simple dungarees; caught a tram to the Place Verte, and at one of the excellent restaurants there dined royally: our dungarees and sheath-knives arousing no little interest amongst Antwerp's *haut ton,* dressed for the most part in immaculate evening clothes.

Then, since the descent was easy, we moved on to a *café chantant* and made an evening of it. At least Joe did, for he danced with every pretty girl available; was insulted by a man who said he was an officer; there was a spontaneous *mêlée* and Joe won; the defeated generously offered refreshment and asked Joe if he'd got his second mate's ticket, because he wanted a deck officer for the steamer he was due to command; and we rolled down to the Quai Vandyke arm in arm, as merry as grigs, telling the stars of the firmament about "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" and "The Ship I Love"—which were the current songs of that year; and so aboard, to find the cook peacefully asleep on the gang-plank, and the steward chanting lugubrious ditties descriptive of past victories in the prize ring before his glory departed from him!

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Something like a night for a start; and it all sounds very terrible and pagan; but it was nothing to some that followed; for even a teetotaller can have his unrestrained moments, and there's as much intoxication, under certain conditions, in atmosphere as in alcohol.

Joe, remembering his neglected duty, made search of the ship once we were aboard; I wearily made my bed on one of the eight shelves: and a bad job it was, too, for the woollen mattress I'd brought seemed to be stuffed with coco-nut shells and marline-spikes. Then I pulled the blankets about me, and so to sleep.

To be awakened, at 5 o'clock, by the roar of "Turn-to, there, young shaver!" from Mr. Perkins, apparently but newly-returned aboard, and looking all the worse for it. Not knowing what else to do, I surlily said: "Oh, all right." That wasn't half-deck etiquette, of course; not by any means. Mr. Perkins stumbled over the high door sill, cracking his shins against the brass-bound step, cracking them against the corner of Chamberlain's ironbound sea-chest, hung his liver-coloured malignant face over the edge of my bunk, wafted a gust of stale liquor into my nostrils, and roared:

"Say 'sir' when you address an officer, see?"

"Ay, ay," responded I, as cheerily as I could, for I admit I was almost nauseated.

"'Sir,'" rasped he. "Ay, ay, sir," meekly responded I. He viewed me with much disfavour, seemed to contemplate violence; but turned away with a thick grunt. "I'll make some of you light-the-binnacle boys sit up and take notice before I've done with you!" he snorted disgustedly. "Get out on deck!" I hopped from my bunk, and cast about for the bath-room, which was non-existent; encountered Joe, who had been busy preparing coffee in the galley, and who laughed joyously at my search, advising me to ask the mate for the loan of the cabin bath-room if I thirsted after cleanliness; and recommended me to get a potful of coffee from the galley before the stevedores came down and cadged the lot.

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I was to find that although an almost fanatical cleanliness is the rule aboard sailing-ships so far as the ship herself is concerned, the rule does not apply in equal measure to the crew. Scarcity of fresh water in the open sea accounts for it, probably. This first morning I found the fresh-water pump at the mainmast and made some sort of a toilet, jeered at by certain women on the wharf, who ought to have known better; was soundly rated by the third mate for wasting fresh water without permission; got into my dungarees and swallowed a pannikinful of acrid, unsweetened coffee, and prepared to turn-to and become a genuine salt water sailor.

"You see that heap of sacks, there!" said the third mate, indicating a mighty pile inside the door of a newly-opened dock-shed. They were good sacks; bright and well-filled, big sacks and nubbly. I said I saw them plainly.

"Say 'sir' when you speak to me," snapped Punch Butchard; not at all the genial soul of overnight. His visit ashore had apparently gingered up his liver. He was new to officer's rank, too; and I expect he wanted to know what being "sirred" felt like. Most of us are that way, if we'd only admit it!

"Yes, I see them—sir."

"Take your hands out of your pockets and stop that hellish whistling. Fetch those sacks aboard, carry them down to the lazarette, and empty them into the breadtanks. Move, you young——" He shaped well, so I moved. And I kept on moving. Each sack weighed a hundred pounds, being filled with Liverpool biscuits—"pantiles" as I came to call them. I had had no experience in the scientific handling of weights. There was no one to instruct or assist; I was required to work out my own salvation. It was a case of go ashore, heave a sack awkwardly to my shoulder, trot across the wharf, dodging all the evilly controlled traffic of Belgium; tripping over metals; stumbling up the precarious gang-plank—and the rising tide increased its slope, along the deck, up the poop-ladder, down the sail-locker ladder, down deeper still to the

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musty lazarette; a blessed moment of ease what time I cut the string and allowed the pantiles to rattle into an enormous tank—back again ashore; up with another sack——

The morning warmed up; so did I, who had done no manual labour in my life. I snatched a moment to get rid of my jacket—that was better, until the gritty crumbs of the biscuits made the coarse sacking like sandpaper, and stripped the skin from my neck and shoulders by agonizing inches.

The cranes commenced depositing truckload after truckload of coke into our holds, that still gaped greedily. The scheme was to lift a truck some fifteen or twenty feet above the yawning hatchways, knock out a bolt, permit its side to drop and all its dusty contents to pour downward. A merry, warmish little breeze was blowing. The timing of it all was very accurate.

Exactly as I reached the gang-plank the big truck vomited its load, the happy wind puffed, and the half-ton or so of choking dust swirled about me. A mathematician couldn't have synchronized details more accurately. It never entered my ignorant head to alter the timing of my journeys. I gradually grew half bemused, working like one in a dream—or a vague nightmare. If I paused for a breather, Mr. Perkins's bell-like voice quickened me to speedy action again. I seemed to be emptying all the bread-sacks in the world into an unfillable tank, the size of a town-hall. So this was going to sea!

But, in spite of smart and discomfort, a queer desire to make a success of the job took possession of me. Be beaten by a few bread-sacks. Never!

There seemed to be scores of them, hundreds, millions; a full year's supply for thirty men or so.

In the mate's temporary absence the cook shifted the gang-plank, so that I got a direct walk from the wharf to the poop, and that was a help; but the suggestion had never been mentioned to me. You're supposed to use your own common sense at sea. I ought to have thought of this labour-saving device for myself, of course; but I'd never been trained in the minimizing of effort; I'd never been trained in anything, so far

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as I could see, that was likely to prove useful—not even how to say "sir" to a superior officer. But I was already learning. I carried the first fifty sacks down the two ladders of the sail-locker and lazarette; I dropped the second fifty from the upper hatch-coaming. Actually, although I didn't know it, I was performing a definite service to the *Ravenby's* as yet unchosen crew, for the iron-hard biscuits could not be broken by less violent means. But the steward returning, mellowed by gin, roared at me for wasting good bread; so, learning cunning now, I waited until he was below, sleeping it off, before dropping any more sacks. It's a great school, a windjammer!

Aching all over, smarting on top of the ache, blinded by dust, for, when experience taught me to alter my timing over the gang-plank, the diabolical crane-man altered his time to correspond, dripping at every pore, dazed, scorched and thirsty, I went on hefting sacks. They got bigger, heavier, more nubbly, but I had to go on. Slavery, peonage—they were pastimes by comparison! I had a notion, though, that I was being laughed at, and my dander rose. Then—gorgeous relief—the steward clanged a bell at the companion door; the mate sang out: "Manjay, manjay!" in his best Castillian, and I knew that it was breakfast-time.

I'd earned that breakfast, believe me, and they might have granted me the boon of a decent meal. I got what the owners considered full and plenty of good plain food: a ladleful of salt-beef stew: a shred or two of rancid salt-horse swimming in greasy water amongst two wizened potatoes, unpeeled; a fistful of biscuits, and a canful of the coffee I'd had at five o'clock, warmed-up—and nothing more. Before attacking the putrid stuff I had to fetch it from the galley, wash my plate at the head pump for'ard and clear out four-by-two mess table of chunks of coke and sundry oddments casually hurled into the half-deck by passing stevedores, who mistook it for a midden. Empty as I was, I couldn't face that meal; so, after tenderly examining my bleeding wounds—I was skinned as to neck and shoulder—I went ashore and bought a breakfast: honest ham and eggs, and succulent rolls and well-creamed

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coffee galore, and it tasted sweeter than honey in the honeycomb. The café I patronized was but a short stone's throw from where the bread-sacks were piled; but I received a torrent of filthy abuse from the mate on my return, for venturing ashore without permission!

Bitter, am I? I say no word that is less than truth. As I pen these words the honest dockers of England are striking for twelve shillings a day, of eight hours. They are dislocating the country's domestic economy until their demands are satisfied. I have often seen them doing a full day's work; and I say that, judged by their scale, I have performed two full days' work during my first day aboard the *Ravenby,* toiling as any driven slave might toil, from 5.30 a.m. to 7 p.m., and not only got not one halfpenny for doing it, but paid for the privilege by my premium; and was even denied an eatable meal by the parsimonious owners, who'd robbed my ignorant father to satisfy their own disgusting greed. And I hope the souls of all the apprentices those blighters of youth ever drove to sullen despair are mocking them now as they fret and scorch on the white-hot grids!

It's all long ago and far away; and conditions have since vastly improved; but I know that when I discovered a small talent for the written word, I took solemn vow that my greatest efforts of all should be expended in an endeavour to ameliorate the lot of that hard-lying ocean Ishmael, the premium apprentice.

Returning aboard after breakfast, with the mate's blasphemies dazing my brain, I sat me down in the half-deck, on my sea-chest, and promptly fell asleep. I didn't hear the turn-to shouted, but slept serenely on, and when lugged forth by the virtuously indignant mate, was accused of loafing because I'd stolen five minutes in excess of the allotted forty-five. Then I went lifting sacks again; my sores having nicely stiffened and no one advising me to bandage them. Presently all the sacks were emptied.

"Now you shall do some *work,*" said Mr. Perkins. Until noon, with no let-up, I helped to roll casks of beef and pork

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aboard, and strike them down the forepeak: afterwards stowing them away below. Hardish work this, for one unaccustomed to the vagaries of a 300-lb. cask of salt pork. Dinner came at noon: more stew, but the potatoes peeled this time, and the meat "fresh." It was hot weather and old stock. I asked permission to go ashore for dinner, and was harshly berated for turning up my nose at honest victual; which was not what the cabin was getting, though even that, I found, was poor grub enough. Shore-going was prohibited—I tackled the ship's fare.

"How're you liking it?" asked Joe, now awake. What could a man say, even although his nails were torn and bleeding, his entire body one concentrated ache, his shirt—handiwork of a devoted parent—in grimy tatters?

"Not so bad; might be worse!" It might have been, but not much.

My post-prandial task was shovelling coal down the forepeak, change of work, according to windjammer ethics, being as good as a rest. After it was down it was necessary to stow it away, working by the uncertain light of a stenchful slush-lamp. Stifling down there it was—gloomy, too, for like most slush-lamps, mine apologized for little light by much odour. However, I decided the seventh circle had now been reached—my father'd read the "Inferno" to me—and matters couldn't very well worsen. But the curious part of it all was that I enjoyed it after a fashion! Almost, I fancy, as if I'd been indued officially with manhood's rights and privileges. There was nothing romantic about these labours; and, so far as dreams went, they had nothing whatever to do with going to sea—as going to sea had appeared to my imagination—but, ah, well! there is a lot of fine, confused satisfaction in doing a job decently, no matter whether it be club-hauling an endangered ship off a lee-shore—*vide* Peter Simple—or stowing a hundred tons of cheap Belgian coal down a nineteenth-century windjammer's forepeak.

So the morning and the long, long afternoon were the first day.

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Bathed, clad in seemly garments, I supped. Chamberlain —man of experience—had decked his bunk with neat chintz curtains and pinned photographs to the bulkhead. I determined to go ashore and buy myself curtains and such-like oddments, but fell very soundly asleep on my sea-chest instead. Chamberlain must have shoved me into my bunk, for it was there I wakened next morning to the inspiring turn-to call.

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CHAPTER VI

OUTWARD BOUND

"SHAW," said the third mate, "show these new fellows around a bit." My shipmates had arrived. Thus came reward. I was already an old-timer! Be sure I reaped that reward to the full. Had I as many voyages to my credit as old Hakluyt I could not have been more patronizing. It must have been a laughable proceeding enough, but my fellow-first-voyagers took it with astonishing and gratifying seriousness. The very charming mother of one of them asked me if I were satisfied that her boy—her Benjamin—was sufficiently equipped for the rigours of sea-life; and tearfully she hung on my words of wisdom!

The seniors amongst the new-comers, ignoring us youngsters, were busy with their own affairs. There were three, in addition to Chamberlain: Toby Elliott, Tottie and Jeffcott; and Chamberlain was the *arbiter elegantiarum* of that quartet. All were disgruntled and fed to the teeth at prospect of another voyage.

"I've sort of lost the praying habit," I heard Toby say; "but this time at home I prayed every night that old Perkins would commit a murder and get hung!"

"There isn't a rope thick enough to hold him," grunted Jeffcott.

"Oh, my God, he's back!" literally sobbed Tottie Winder. "Hell!"

Mr. Perkins was unpopular with the half-deck that had had experience of his little ways.

"Well, there's one thing to be thankful for: the old man isn't taking his wife and that rotten kid this trip," Chamberlain stated, putting as good a light as possible on evil fortune.

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Oh, yes: they'd "sent their little Cupids all ashore" with a vengeance! But, almost before they'd got their sea-chests in place and pitched their bedding into their respective bunks, Mr. Perkins was down on them with a possessive glare in his eyes, detailing them for various duties. There wasn't a moment to be wasted in that workhouse. Toby, who'd broken his thigh the previous voyage through falling from the main-royal stay when making the staysail fast in a squall, was put into Chamberlain's place as night-watchman. Joe was ordered aloft to assist the riggers who were bending sail; Jeffcott must accompany him in that task. Tottie, who, as his nickname indicated, was of a shy and girlish stamp, must hang about the decks to give a hand: to slacken a gant-line here, or give a pull on a rope there. We youngsters would continue embarking stores. So we did throughout the day—myself acting as experienced gang foreman when no one of authority was looking; and at knock-off I cleaned myself and accompanied Robinson ashore to dine with his mother and brother at their hotel, where they looked after us handsomely, and Mrs. Robinson encouraged me to talk of my home and my mother, and, at the evening's end, kissed me and said: "I thought you were a man; I see you are only a child!"

Robinson, I found—a common misery drawing us together—was even less familiar with sea-going conditions than myself. Please be quite certain that I told him all that I could remember, and much that I fabricated, concerning my first eventful voyage to the Mediterranean, and gave myself airs accordingly, producing the certificate of discharge for his inspection that I had won during that month. The call of the sea had dinned resistlessly into his ears in an Irish county where his ancestors had taken root in soil presented to them by Cromwell in reward for services rendered. He himself had practically never stepped beyond the borders of the family estate until then: the local rector had tutored him; he had ridden to hounds since he could bestride a pony, the tenantry had adored him and sped him on his wayward way with tearful Irish blessings. He, too, had fallen victim to the spe-

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cious advertising sharks, and had joined ship with an outfit that would have fitted out a whole ship's company. He had read Clark Russell and Marryat voraciously; he was a year younger than I, and as ignorant. He had never associated with boys of his own age.

"Let's be pals," he suggested as we made our way aboard the *Ravenby*. Thus it was agreed, and the friendship weathered the years of our common servitude nobly. Then the Boer War claimed him. I do not know whether he lived or died. I had a letter from him, written on the evening of a major battle; that was his last word to me. If he died, I am sure he died well, for he was a gallant lad, as our association through trying years fully proved.

The day following the general joining ship was a Sunday. "This day being the Sabbath," ran the entry in the ship's log, "no unnecessary work was done." It all depends upon the exact meaning of the word "unnecessary." But having washed down—the first time it had been done for weeks, having polished the brasswork and scrubbed the bright wood—trifles neglected on working days—having loosed the newly-bent sails to dry after the night dews, having scrubbed out our half-deck and filled the captain's bath-tank, having stowed away a few tons of urgent stores—I, by reason of my dye-poisoned sores, being granted easement to the extent of being graciously allowed to clean out, with hand-scrubber and soapy water, the first, second and third mates' cabins below—we were informed that the rest of the day was our own. It was a fine day. There were three of us first-voyagers; Crowther being the third; and we had money in our pockets. We were in Antwerp, where temptation stalked on every pavement. Toby, as night-watchman, was supposed to remain on duty aboard throughout the Sunday. Jeffcott, although only an actual second-voyager on deep water, was by virtue of his *Conway* training, of equal seniority with Chamberlain and Tottie. In a community that bases a man's worth not on his means or his social status, but simply by his sea service, I was unfitted to companion with oldsters. Consequently, we three

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lads, newly emerging into young manhood, were given the full run of Antwerp, and all that it signifies, without a word of warning spoken.

We three, fevered by the intriguing novelty of a foreign port, marked down by our very uniforms as easy prey, had but to cross the road to find all pleasure beckoning. Touts came whispering, hinting at piquancies, fair frail ones beckoned and smiled. There were three of us: sufficient unto ourselves. But if we'd been alone! And not a hint given to warn us. Our kind, Christian captain ignored our very existence, save to satisfy himself that we were working hard. Nay—it went deeper than that. Leering Mr. Perkins, watching us across the gang-plank, coarsely hinted that now was our chance to prove our manhood.

Being not such rotten boys as all that, I hope, we went into the heart of Antwerp, and there found a summer *kermesse*—a fair—where we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Coco-nut shies and shooting galleries held a stronger appeal for us than houses of ill-fame. True, some of the sideshows would not have been tolerated on an English fairground; there was much that was salacious or seductive, but we made the discovery, curiosity growing in our young souls, that that sort of thing somehow didn't appeal. What we wanted mostly was food, and we spent so much of that Sunday in eating that we hadn't much time to get into mischief!

Incidentally, we got to know one another; to know one another with that amazing intimacy that characterizes deep-sea friendships. We were crossing Life's threshold together, our virgin eyes were sharing new amazements in common. We compared our sisters. We vowed we'd make good sailors of ourselves; we mentioned our ambitions.

Robinson had hoped for the Royal Navy; Crowther, whose father was a naval officer of much service, opined that the Navy was an overrated calling.

"Too much makee spit-and-polish!" was his dictum. "And you can't live on your pay. You spend it all on gold leaf to suck up to the Admiral during inspections."

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It was a good day: that Sunday; our last ashore for four clear months. We returned aboard at a seemly hour, to find Toby anxious that one of us should relieve him whilst he ran ashore in hope of meeting his fellow-seniors. One of us volunteered, and off he limped, after describing, for the *n*th time already, how his leg had been fractured and how the skipper had set it, using a handy-billy to draw the overlapping bone clear. Toby was the dearest fellow in the world, and as good a sailorman as ever walked a gang-plank; but he bored us—oh, how he bored us!—with his recurrent details of that accident. In his calendar was no Deluge. The events of existence dated: "Before I broke my leg," or "After I broke my leg." He seemed to acquire a halo by reason of his misadventure, and whether walking, sitting, or lying, contrived to bring his damaged limb into the picture. It dominated our half-deck, that fractured femur, as King Charles's Head dominated Mr. Dick's attempts at authorship. Commanding a noble liner, as he does to-day, I'm certain he will not mind me saying that, after a few months, we got rather sick of his broken leg!

Next day was full of bustle: a thousand things were to be done, for we were to sail on the Tuesday morning's tide. More stores were embarked; certain of us boys were sent below to stow coke under the deck-beams: later, we new-comers must go ashore to sign ourselves on to the ship's articles for the first and only time. We saw nothing of the crew during this signing: we did not associate the shabby derelicts who hung about the door of the shipping office with our future ship-mates. A clerk gabbling incoherences breathlessly, added: "Sign here; touch the pen if you can't write," and the formality was over. If we failed to be aboard the *Ravenby* at midnight we should rank as deserters; we'd clinched the chains about us!

"Get you back aboard and turn-to!" snarled Mr. Perkins, in whom the fumes of stale alcohol seemed still aflame. So we went aboard and worked until midnight, being mere gentlemen rope-haulers and not free men on pay.

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The crew joined ship about midnight, and all Antwerp must have been aware of the fact. There were only about fourteen or fifteen of them all told, including the petty officers, but they made noise enough for an army. Half a dozen free fights appeared to be going on at the same time. A woman was tearing her hair and clothing, and screaming pollution in half the tongues of Europe. Someone or other of the crew owed her money for favours received. A little wizened man threw money at her, and, as she still continued her foulnesses, carefully steeped a swab in the filth of the scuppers and slapped her across the mouth with it. Then he gave her more money.

"You might as well have it as the b—— crimps!" the generous one hiccoughed.

A coal-black nigger, his eyeballs showing as unnaturally white as his teeth, hammered ceaselessly on the for'ard mooring bitts with a belaying-pin and chanted some Obi black mass of his own devising, in a rich, oily voice. A sodden Finn, hanging over the rail, more outboard than in, snored like elephants trumpeting. All very unseemly and all very sordid, but a very characteristic sailing night, as later experience went to show. For who'd go to virtual slavery sober, if it could be avoided?

Foxy-faced shore-fellows were in evidence, too: seeking to extract the last poor coins from the hapless ones' pockets by every artifice known to the long-shore gang.

"You don't got no bed?" asked one of these blood-suckers oilily. "You gif me a quid—I gits one—a good one, hair mattress. Qvick!" A sovereign changed hands—the sailor's last—and the messenger vanished; never, of course, to return. No doubt this particular philanthropist's favourite hobby was stealing coppers from blind men's tins!

But presently a brief calm fell upon the *Ravenby*. The roared, tuneless choruses in the forecastle ceased, the last crimp, having thoughtfully helped himself to such poor pickings as were available, disappeared ashore. We of the half-

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deck had been warned to hold ourselves in readiness for the dawn-hour sailing; and most of us were cold sober. So we turned out when Toby called us, and clustered somewhat miserably about the after-hatch. A distinct wave of self-pity, that I misnamed home-sickness, afflicted me. The other juniors were in the same boat. Shore-folk came like draggled ghouls and hung about the shore-end of the gangway. A powerful tug ranged ghostily alongside out of the early morning mists, a raucous-voiced skipper demanded attention to his heaving-line. A pilot, swollen-headed and inarticulate with sleep and stale schnaps, stumped aboard.

"Turn-to!" rapped the third mate, bursting on deck like a cork from a pop-gun. "Get those mooring-chains aboard. Where's the crew? Rouse 'em out!" The second mate, biting a corner from a tobacco-plug, belting his trousers and settling a greasy cap on his head all at once, slithered for'ard to take the tally of the new crew. One man was short: he'd done a pierhead jump. The shipping clerk was notified: the delinquent's advance-note would be stopped. A new man was wanted. The mate, bleary-eyed, singled out one of the crowd ashore and demanded his discharges. Papers were produced, the man was hustled below, with an onion-eyed boarding-house runner beside him, and signed on to the ship's articles, an advance-note was given and commandeered by the runner; a bag and bed were chucked aboard; and our complement was up to full strength.

"Single her in!" said Mr. Perkins. We boys did it all—the men were unfit. We made fast the iron-hard towing hawser and the tug ranged into position. The gangway was withdrawn, our last ropes were slacked away and we were off: without a single cheer, without a single waved handkerchief. It was a most commonplace departure, but we hadn't time to notice it, for we were now beginning real work: flaking down the mooring-ropes to dry, cutting down the running rigging, trimming the yards, and commencing to clean the ship of her accumulated grime and stowing away below the last few

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trucks of coke that had been pitched aboard overnight.

The seaborne traffic of half Europe appeared to be converging on the mouth of the muddy Scheldt. Big liners, fussy, rusty-sided tramps, imposing sailing ships, they were all there—with the salt of the distant seas dried upon them; and I—I was one of that noble brotherhood—what did immediate discomfort matter?

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CHAPTER VII

GETTING TOGETHER

JUNIOR apprentices' work, we youngsters discovered after the *Ravenby* had set her lower topsails, was varied in the extreme. Cleaning out the pig-pen was one phase, carrying hot water for the captain's bath was another, shifting startled fowl—earmarked for the cabin table—from coop to pen was another. There was coal to be got up from the forepeak for the galley; there were stores to shift from the lazarette to transom-lockers for the steward. Most of the previously stowed stores had to be rearranged. The ship had a slight list—apprentices must go below and shift the cargo in compensation. The Channel pilot claimed, as his lawful perquisite, a chunk of salt-horse, and none was at hand.

"Hi, mister, let them blasted boys break out a cask of salt beef!" was the immediate order. It was excellent training in general handiness, I must confess, and sailing day passed with astounding rapidity for us "light-the-binnacle-boys," who were not allowed a single second's idleness. After dinner, which we took in snatches between tasks, the clean run of the wind in the topsails gave the *Ravenby* so much way that the tug was hard-set to keep ahead of her in the white-capped water.

"Loose your upper topsails!" came the cry. Loosing them was one thing; hoisting them was another. The forecastle hands were still incapable of action, and though we were equipped with a donkey-engine, there was no steam in its boiler. Mr. Perkins decided that the time was opportune for rousing out the laggards in the forecastle, and set to work, the second and third mate assisting. It was not a pretty spectacle, and there was quite a lot of harsh language, and not a few hard blows. But in the end the topsail halyards were

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manned and the yards climbed slowly—terribly slowly—up the masts. There was no suggestion of willingness about the work, for these men, mixed, unfamiliar with one another, who were later to pull together with the beautiful precision of a machine, had not yet found themselves.

"Oh, come on bullies—start a chantey, someone!" shouted the second mate, well beforehand on the halyards.

A withered Manxman, the only Britisher for'ard of the main hatch of that British ship, responded. He surged forward on the rope, spat on his hands, and then, in an incredibly monstrous voice, chanted:

"O—oh, Boney was a warrior!" I had never heard a chantey before, didn't even know such things existed. The effect of this single, not over-tuneful stave was electrical.

"To me—way—oh—way!" roared the old-timers, and hauled in unison. "Oh, Boney was a warrior!" bellowed Rhys, and "Johnny Frangswar" chorused the rest. The yard went up a full foot at a time, in obedience to the bull-like pulls at every accented syllable. It was as if the doggerel, which swiftly became salacious, possessed a magnetizing virtue—in a trice, by comparison with the long-drawn, reluctant hauls, the weighty spar was mast-headed by sweating men.

"Well, the main—foretopsail halyards!"

We streamed forward; and Rhys tuned up his stentorian pipe.

"You've heard of Reuben Ranzo-o-o!" he began, and I swear there was a happy laugh amongst all who tailed on to the rope, and the old-timers, to whom chanteys were as well known as are "Hymns Ancient and Modern" to a church worker, piped the pully-hauly chorus expertly: "Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!" The first syllable of "Ranzo" was accented, and the orderly pull accompanied the accentuation. Up went that yard in an inspiring fashion, what time Rhys followed the fortunes of "Ranzo" through devious experiences until, from shipping as boy aboard a whaler, he succeeded to the command and married the captain's lovely daughter; with Jeffcott aloft overhauling the buntlines.

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"I thought I heard our chief mate say," sang Rhys after a while, and the "Ranzo, boys, Ranzo" chorus bleated out across the Flemish shoals:

"Give one more pull and then belay"——

"Well, the fore topsail; let fall your foresail," came from Mr. Perkins. It was always "Your foresail," "your topsail," "your royal," in those days; never "Our foresail," or "our topsail," or "my foresail"—as if the responsible authorities desired to shift all responsibility to shoulders other than their own.

So the big foresail was dropped from its gaskets, and the tug, realizing its triviality, blew its whistle as a sign that it was retiring from action, and knocked loose its towing-hook to let the hawser run free, and ranged alongside for the note to the ships agents, authorizing payment for duty done.

A minute only and the tug departed in a cloud of steam from her valedictory whistle; and we were on our own, for good or evil. The wind was fresh and fair; vigorous but not vicious.

"Shake out your topgans'ls, mister!"

"Ay, ay, sir! Up aloft, you boys; loose the t'gans'ls!"

Chanteying was not necessary to hoist these lighter yards, and the *Ravenby* felt their added thrust once more. With a growing feather of white and rustling spray pushed before her forefoot, she lurched out to meet such adventure as awaited her.

And as yet we boys were strangers in the midst of strangeness. We blindly obeyed, to the best of our ability, every command that came our way.

"Tell one of the boys," was the inevitable cry. Fine, mixed labour, believe me. What did it matter? Here we were—aboard a proper ship at last—after much dreaming; part of her, playing definite rôles in her economy. Tired we were, but willing. When the crew slunk away to their forecastles, we persevered: bustled about by too-zealous officers, bruising

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ourselves poignantly in our young ignorance, lifting weights beyond our capacity, always doing something.

There was no time to observe the pulsing beauty of the canvas-clothed ship as, heeled slightly to the strong thrust of the good wind, she purred her way through the brisking waters that overlie the Flemish shoals: no time to take notice of the flat coastland whereon the houses stood stark and square, like trees growing from the water itself; no time to do anything indeed but work, until kindly night drooped down out of the wind-filled sky and gave us temporary easement.

"Lay aft, all hands: pick watches!" buzzed the third mate in his tireless enthusiasm.

We mustered aft, and the watches were chosen—the mate taking first pick. And from then on we formed new alliances and new allegiances. Toby, senior of our watch, struck the note for the four of us. "We'll make our watch the best," he said. And, by the simple saying of it, he bred up on our part a blind, unquestioning obedience to the second mate, who was nobody's friend: the fifth wheel of the coach, indeed. I thought myself unfortunate in being separated from Chamberlain; yet, had I but known it, my lines were cast in pleasant places, for Rhys, that wise and wizened old man of the sea, was to be my watchmate during the coming months: and Rhys was the type of man who believes in walking five, or even six, or perhaps seven, furlongs along that valuable second mile of Holy Writ. His chiefest delight it was to impart information, to act as unpaid instructor to young ambition. A stern taskmaster he proved, but a just one; and, as the event proved, he not only taught me the whole art of seamanship, so far as technical work was concerned, but he also instructed me in the noble art of self-defence, so that, at the appointed time, I was able to lick the swagger nigger of the port-watch when he called me by the unforgivable name. A great man, James Rhys, for all that his wages, in common with the rest of his fellows, were but two pounds five shillings a month!

Then, too, Toby, broken leg and all, was a wise and sober

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tutor, and, furthermore, the second mate was so newly out of his time as to have a tender spot in his heart for the half-deck crowd: so I might have done much worse.

According to ship-law a captain takes a ship out to sea and the mate brings her home: consequently we, of the starboard watch, were required to remain on deck from eight until midnight, but had permission to go below until eight o'clock, it then being seven-thirty.

Toby, a born autocrat, took control of our destinies. We rearranged our sleeping-gear: starboard watch to the starboard side, and began to establish a closer friendship amongst ourselves, for between the two watches there was always stern rivalry. We decided that we were lucky to be in Mr. Sayle's watch, as he seemed less of a martinet than Mr. Perkins, and Toby and Jeffcott—wise in their generation—considered it might be possible to steal surreptitious naps on the sea-chests during the watch on deck.

"So long as one of us is always handy to give a call," decreed Toby, and spent the remaining minutes of our watch below in detailing the manner in which he broke his leg and how it was set, and what the shore doctors thought of the job.

"Eight bells," he said, as the tinkles sounded aft, and tucked his bubbling pipe away in his bunk. "Out on deck, starbowlines!" Out on deck we went, into the growing inkiness of the Channel night. Away to starboard a bright light was flashing whitely: to port some windmill arms of radiance were sweeping the sky: lights on the French coast. Ahead was a cluster of bobbing will-o'-the-wisps, and the red and green lights of the trawlers.

"A town ahead, an' the chemist's shop at the corner of the street," said Rhys as we mustered.

"The watches are aft, sir," reported the mate, who had called the roster: not so much to prove the men there as to prove that none had been washed overboard since the last roll-call.

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"Grog-ho!" said the skipper.

"Good ship—oh, good ship," the men rumbled. "Grog-ho first night out, eh?"

The steward slid down the pop ladder with a bucket; man by man the crew filed past, each to receive his tot of much-diluted rum. We teetotallers did not know what we missed.

"Relieve the wheel and look-out: watch on deck keep aft: watch below keep handy for a call," said Mr. Perkins. And our first night-watch began.

At the beginning there was not much to do: the hands hung about a bit uncertainly, pacing the deck between our deck-house and the main fife-rail, sneaking off one by one for smokes. Such as remained, talked together in grumbling undertones.

Jeffcott was at the wheel. Toby, watching a chance, slid into the half-deck for a turning-in yarn with Chamberlain. Robinson and I didn't quite know what to do. We sat on the after-hatch, talking for some time, until the marrow-penetrating chill of a Channel night froze us; then, his teeth chattering he suddenly vanished. He was discovered at dawn soundly asleep amongst the chicken in the fowl-pen, with a lot of feathers in his hair and tears dried on his cheeks. "Chicken" he was named from that hour forward, as was inevitable.

"Light the binnacle, boy!" shouted a voice from the poop. Not knowing what was meant I paid not the slightest heed, but went on dreaming of a snug fire-side at home.

"Light the binnacle, boy!" came again. "Where are those blasted boys?"

I took no notice—not knowing what a binnacle was, for the matter of that since no one as yet had seen fit to instruct me in routine duties. Someone came hastily down from the poop, my neck was grasped, I was hauled to my feet. "Who're you? Shaw?" demanded Mr. Sayle. "Didn't you hear me calling? Asleep, I suppose!"

"I wasn't!" I indignantly denied.

"Then why didn't you answer?"

"Why?"

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"If that's Shaw, let him keep time on the poop!" barked the skipper. I went obediently aft: still not knowing what was required of me.

"Light the binnacle, boy!" said Mr. Sayle again.

"How do I do it?" I demanded; quite willing to learn. He took me by the upper arm and marched me to the wheel. He forced me to lift a lamp from the brass hood of the compass-stand.

"You take that lamp and open it," he explained, in words of one syllable, so to speak; "inside you'll find a wick: cotton, you savvy, soaked in oil. You strike a match and you apply it to the oily wick. You blow out the match and you close the little glass door of the little brass lamp. You replace the lamp in the binnacle."

"Yes, sir," I said; "where shall I find the match?"

"Oh, my God!" said Mr. Sayle.

I managed to get a light and slammed the lamp into the binnacle hood. It promptly extinguished itself. I used the rest of the matches and lit the wick again; it went out as I slammed it home into its socket. The lamps of windjammer binnacles are surely the most lefthanded contrivances ever invented by man: giving a minimum of light and a maximum of trouble. Twenty-five years later I found the same pattern still in use, with all its defects, in a "Q" brig I happened to embark aboard. The customs of the sea do not easily change.

Finally, Sayle lit the lamp himself, and I started to trot forward and down the ladder.

"Hi! where are you going? Didn't you hear me tell you to keep aft on the poop?" It was the skipper again: raw-tempered as ever. He clouted my ears, and I decided that when I was a little older I would give him the father and mother of a hammering, if fortune stood my friend.

Somehow the *Ravenby's* poop seemed overcrowded. There were the skipper and the pilot to windward, the second mate hunched a disgruntled track to leeward; I hadn't any appointed gangway. I tried the weather side, knowing no better —I was promptly chivvied to leeward, where I got in Sayle's

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way. He sulphurously advised me to pace athwartships. But I was constantly blundering into someone or other, and every fresh collision meant a torrent of soulful curses. The time seemed to pass slowly. I swear by Neptune's sacred beard that I wanted to be a zealous sailor; I swear that I had every intention of keeping alert when I leaned for a moment against the harness-casks on the foreside of the chart-house, but——

I wakened, very cold, to find myself being thrust by the scruff of the neck towards the companionway, by an angry second mate. Ship-law runs, that having suffered yourself, you promptly pass on the misery endured to someone junior to yourself; I'd forgotten to keep an eye on the companion clock, neglected to strike the bell that marked the passing half-hours: here it was well after midnight, it seemed, and the watch below never called, and Sayle had been blamed for it!

I saw the time by the companion clock—well after one bell in the middle watch, believe me!—went aft, struck the wheel-box bell, and thought I'd finished.

"Go down and call the mate, you young skulping!" I went below, and beat a rare tattoo on the steward's door for a start, until he came out in his shirt under the impression that the ship was sinking, and politely asked of him the mate's location. He was strongly on his dignity, that colossal dignity of the unwhite, and glutinously advised me to find out for myself. Finally I discovered the sea-bedroom of my friend Mr. Perkins. Remembering how Chamberlain and Toby, as night-watchman, had aroused us youngsters in the half-deck at five o'clock in the morning, I proceeded to show myself an apt pupil. Into the mate's cabin I charged like a six-inch shell:

"Hi, there, rise and shine—rise and shine!" I clamoured, thumping my hardest on the bulkhead. "Show a leg for a purser's stocking; rise and shine, you sleepers!" I might have done it more politely: so, at least, Mr. Perkins seemed to think, for he struck a match and surveyed me sardonically. His face resembled a cynical walrus as it hung over the bunk-board.

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"One bell, is it?" he said.

"Gone eight bells, sir!"

"I know that; I've been waiting for you to call me." Then I got it: a verbal broadside that curdled the soul within me. Of course I deserved it. I wasn't to know that certain seamen pride themselves on giving a prompt-to-the-minute relief to their opposite numbers on deck. "And now get the hell out of it!" bellowed the mate. "And next time you call me remember I'm an officer!"

Having called the watch below I had to bear the brunt of the deck-watch's anger. They'd been deprived of a full half-hour's sleep and were peeved about it. Especially Toby, who read me a lecture on duty after he'd hopped, bare-legged, into his bunk and clamped his oily pipe between his teeth. But he went to sleep in the middle of it, and I gather that the pipe dropped from his mouth and spilled its ashes on his chest, so that he inhaled a noseful of them and leaped up with an anguished cry of: "My God! an avalanche!" but as he'd spent most part of the 8–12 watch asleep on the sea-chests in the half-deck, he wasn't really to be pitied.

Home-sickness got in a bit of elementary work on my solar plexus about this time. Sea-sickness followed a little while later, as the *Ravenby* began to feel the disturbing run of the Channel seas. Toby's snores grew into a magnificent crescendo. Dishes in the lockers rattled. A wisp of spray flashed over the half-deck. But presently I was sinking—sinking—oh, so ecstatically! down a velvety shaft of sleep when:

"All hands on deck; 'bout ship" sounded from the poop, and Totty came into our quarters to rouse me out. The wind had hauled, heading us over towards Dover; what with the run of the tide and menace of cliff it was urgently necessary to tack ship and head away towards safety. I've no doubt it was an interesting and thoroughly seamanly evolution, but I didn't take much interest in it. The sea was making too free with me. I was very cold and very sick.

"That'll do, the watch below. Keep handy for a call!" By

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now I'd forgotten whether I was watch below or watch on deck. Swimming head pillowed on Crowther's nauseatingly dubbined sea-boots, I prayed for death.

Mr. Perkins, returning aft from his labours on the forecastle head, snorted over us.

"Here, some of you: stick these sick Nelsons in their little cots!" he rasped. So merciful oblivion followed, during which the ship, despite our earlier hopes, did not sink.

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CHAPTER VIII

WILD WEATHER

We were given twenty-four hours wherein to recover, but all things having at least one end, and *mal de mer* having an official end after a couple of rounds of the clock, we contrived to weather the trouble, though the next few watches savoured of Purgatory. However, growl you may—go you must; and we survived—limp, sorrowful, and lip-curling—until another twenty-four hours had gone. Then we developed Gargantuan appetites, and the sea initiated us.

There was much work for us, for the ship was making short tacks down-Channel against a dead muzzler of a W.S.W. breeze, with a fair amount of weight in it. The crew were temporarily on "calashee watches"—all hands slept when they could, worked when they must. It was very cold and very wet; and I found that heavy leather sea-boots, with soles like glass, weren't the most desirable footwear. Every time the ship rolled I discovered myself sliding until my feet went from under me, and I sailed ingloriously into the scuppers amid a frothy brew of dirty water and tangled ropes. The only consolation was that one or other of the first-voyagers was generally on top or beneath me. I was quick to learn, however. A strand of rope yarn knotted about a boot's sole —Rhys put me wise here—lessened slipperiness. Better still: "bare webs" gave the surest foothold of all. Drenchings were frequent: not knowing that a sailor's oilskins are more valuable to him than his rifle to a soldier, or her honour to a woman, we young 'uns treated our "oilies" cavalierly. They avenged themselves upon us by splitting and leaking. My oilskin coat, ripped across the back, was worthless, but the invaluable Rhys, made a friend for life by a packet of matches in a matchless desert, discovered an ancient coat somewhere—

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I think he stole it from a Finn—and handed it over as a gift.

After wearily sliding north and south, making as much leeway as we made headway, we found a fair slant of wind that carried us boisterously to the Start, and a fishing boat ranged alongside of us to relieve us of our pilot. Fresh fish was tossed aboard in return for gifts of tobacco and salt-horse, and the cry went that the pilot was leaving and that all letters for shore must be promptly delivered. Of course, we hadn't written those final letters; at least, we'd indited grim and soul-curdling epistles in between spasms of sea-sickness; and our embryo manhood prevailing, we'd torn them up when better conditions prevailed.

"Well, good-bye, Capt'n; good-bye, boys!" the pilot said, cocking a leg over the rail. "Reckon you'll need your oil-skins to-night!" We did!

* * * * * * * *

A storm at sea is more harrowing in the retrospect than in the reality, I think, for a working member of a ship's crew. He has too much labour to perform to worry about the risks he's running. None the less, it is in a sailing ship that one gets some idea of the colossal majesty of a gale.

Your windjammer depends for her life on the sheer physical exertions of the men aboard her, controlled by officers who possess small real authority, outside their own personality, that is; for the laws of the merchant service in my windjamming days were ludicrously inadequate. Yet, in all my days, in Army, in Royal Flying Corps, or in Royal Navy during the grim years of war, I have never encountered a keener and tauter discipline than ruled beneath the wind-whipped Red Ensign. I have attempted to analyze the cryptic mysteries of that compelling force that welded a polyglot crowd of mulish, growling and temperamentally hostile men: Scandinavians, Dagoes, negroes, clean whites and mulattoes, into a solid and indomitable phalanx of purposeful manhood, who refused to admit defeat even when knocked clean over the ropes, and their enemy the sea, waited, snarling and white-lipped, to administer the ultimate knock-out blow, as they

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staggered back into the grim arena where the only prize to be won was the meagre boon of continued life. And I have failed —it exists, that is all.

But the discipline held true, and the *Ravenby* striking foul weather, and the wind coming away in increasing squalls from the S.W. to make a dead muzzler of it, the English western land became a dangerous lee-shore.

We did not run for shelter: British merchant craft are not encouraged to do that. There was an immediate but not disorderly confusion, for we of the crew were already learning to pull together. We youngsters, having stubbed our toes against every eye-and-ring-bolt, and having grazed our shins against spars and the like, were getting an inkling of the duties required of us.

So that when "Stand by royal halyards!" sounded, Chicken and I moved automatically towards clewlines and spilling-gear, and stood waiting. The only mistake we made was in not donning our oilskins, as we found when a slashing shower came moaning. I naturally started for the half-deck in search of waterproof gear.

"Where are you going, Shaw? Back on deck—pronto!" It was useless to plead or argue, even if obedience meant torment or death. In five minutes Chicken and I were wringing wet: sodden as sponges.

"First the rain and then wind; topsail sheets and halyards mind!" quoth Toby sagely. "It's going to be a snifter!"

"Clew up your fore and main royals! All hands shorten sail!" Down rattled the upper yards, up went the clews. There were wild, alarming frappings, suddenly quelled. Then a low, rushing roar, and the rain-sheets commenced to drive horizontally. As much of the sea as was visible between the misted horizons was swiftly laced with tumbling white.

"Here she comes; stand by topgallant halyards!" It was as if a giant's resistless hand had pushed the ship over. Loose gear fetched noisily away to leeward. So did I—on the wet slanting deck my boasted leather sea-boots secured no grip. A dollop of chilly spray accompanied me to the scuppers, and,

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imagination aiding consternation, I thought the ship was sinking and I with her. When I got upright again and clawed a way to where the noise proceeded from, I found the elder apprentices were already aloft, to furl the royals, and the upper topgallant yards that were down on the caps; whilst men were hauling bravely on spilling-lines and the like gear. A sail can be snugged into something approaching quiescence by the ropes rove round its belly.

The wind was increasing in force with every passing minute: squall succeeded biting squall. Ropes, saturated, became pitiless things to handle.

Staysails and head of the spanker came off her as by magic. "Up and stow 'em." But as the men started for the sheerpole —when it's an all-hands job the watch below seldom go aloft higher than the topsail yards—the skipper's monstrous voice dominated the uproar. "Stand by your t'gallant clewlines!" In another biting squall the lower topgallants were clewed up, with much slamming and banging of chain sheets. The stripped yards seemed to jerk like fishing rods.

"Haul the mainsail up!" Quick busy work now, if you like! Everything seemed to be happening at once. Especially so to a youngster endeavouring to make himself useful, notwithstanding: (1) sea-boots whose smooth soles betrayed their wearer in his moment of greatest confidence; (2) rain that drove in to his eyes and blinded them; (3) the intolerance of trained officers and seamen who wanted to work, not to teach; (4) sea-sickness—a brief recurrence; (5) homesickness, and a bewildered wonder why ever a snug and easeful home had been left behind for this abomination of desolation!

My idea of hauling on a rope was to leap beforehand and drag fitfully, what time the much-adjectived sea-boots religiously cut me down, so I hampered the orderly efforts of specialists. When I was kicked to the tail-end of a rope, as frequently happened, some humorist would hand me his slack whilst retaining the bight in his own hands, and sent me careering once more to the scuppers. That men could jest whilst

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the ship was foundering! Had I been as wise for my years as was Crowther, I should have sneaked into the half-deck and coiled down on the chests with a buttered biscuit, and told the ship to extricate herself from her own troubles.

Hauling up a big ship's mainsail, ninety feet in the spread and forty-five in the drop, in half a gale, is no light proceeding. The tack primarily needs attention: the big purchase tackle that normally acts as connecting link between clew and chess-tree, is too heavy to be hauled flailingly aloft, too dangerous, too, for if the clew-garnets carry away, the released clew is apt to whip about in most disconcerting fashion, and —I have seen it—chip the top from a man's head as you'd chip the top from a breakfast egg. So the main tack must be unhooked. This means setting taut the lazy-tack, a comparatively light rope, slacking off and unhooking the tackle, and then slowly easing off the lazy-tack as the men gather in the slack by the clew-garnets, leechlines and buntlines and so reduce the vast stretch of valuable canvas to quietude.

The lazy-tack parted just as the mate dropped from the rail after unhooking the clip-hooks of the top block. It carried away with a roar of a big gun.

"Haul, you sons of sodgers!" yelled Mr. Perkins. But the enormous sail flicked once like a whiplash, and split from clew to head-rope.

"Another hundred quid out o' the measly owners' pockets!" bawled someone; though measly was hardly the word.

"Hi—hi! Up with her! Pull, you paper-backed putty men, you!" The protesting weather clew was run up to the yard-arm, the ropes that encircled the belly of the sail were hauled taut; every inch being madly fought for.

"Over to leeward!" The lee side came up quicker, to the accompaniment of many "Yo ho's."

"Up aloft and furl it!" I started for the rigging; my sea-boots betrayed me yet again as the *Ravenby* gave a heart-searching roll, and slithering, I cannoned into Mr. Perkins's legs, who naturally collapsed and accompanied me, scrabbling, to the roaring scuppers.

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"Ah, you, Shaw—is it?" I was having no luck; everything seemed organized to drive me deeper into degradation, and the bad books of the barque's first mate. I have no doubt that in his own home-circle, wherever that may have been situated, Mr. Perkins was a charming man; amongst his boon companions I can see that he must have been acclaimed as the best of good fellows; but—he and I were simply oil and water, and we couldn't mix. He said everything he had ever said before, with amendments and variations. Losing that valuable sail was a reflection on his seamanship.

When the volcano had spent itself:

"Get this raffle coiled up—lively!" he choked, and stumped heavily aft blowing like a walrus through his draggled moustache. The ropes—braces, halyards, down-hauls, clewlines, buntlines and all the rest of the bewildering assortment of cordage, had been left lying as they'd fallen from the hands of the honest toilers, in the need for haste. The violent movements of the ship, together with the roaring influx of solid water, had resolved them all into an appalling tangle: a regular "Chinese coil." They were all iron-hard with wet combined with their native stubbornness. But for the small matter of my sixteen years, I must have wept.

The ship was close-hauled on the starboard tack, singing through a blackness that might literally be felt. All companionable humanity appeared to be infinitely remote: even the men toiling aloft with hoarse, encouraging cries, might have belonged to a distant planet. I heard a rasping voice cry out: "And, awa—a—ay—oh—and we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots!" That was when they picked up the weighty bunt of the mainsail of course. But the song might have been the wailings of the Valkyries.

A distant shore-light evidenced itself: a heartening gleam to assure a doubting heart that solid land still existed. The Casquets Light, of course: bright beacon of hope to me, menacing threat of impending disaster to those in whose hands the *Ravenby's* destinies lay. There may be more hazardous waters in which a windjammer can disport herself than those

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about the fascinating Channel Islands, but I know of very few, and any Navy man who ran that bleak patrol during the war will, I think, bear me out. For down here about the Casquets the tides run all twisty-ways at once and there are swift, treacherous squalls wherein the wind alters direction with terrible suddenness, so that, gale aiding tide, a stout ship of this minute might easily become the twisted, mangled refuse of the next.

"Down from aloft, all hands!" was heard from aft. "Stand by to go about." I knew afterwards that the position was, like Mr. Chuck's topmast: "Precarious and not at all permanent," but at the moment ighorance blinded me to danger's possibilities. The main problem obsessing the captain's mind was: whether the ship would tack under her present reduced canvas, whether all things considered it mightn't be better to wear her round on her heel: an operation calling for more time and more room, and involving the risk of the ship being gripped by some one or other of those tigerish currents and so swept helplessly to the rock-fangs in the distance.

It was decided to tack and risk it. The captain knew his ship and trusted her—to a certain extent. But she was carrying a cargo of coke that failed to sink her to her load-line. In this trim she might fail to behave as she had previously behaved when differently freighted. And herein may be seen one of the many problems oppressing the sailing ship master's mind: every fresh voyage, every fresh passage, indeed, actually provides him with a different vessel, to all intents and purposes, because of the alterations in her freight and its stowage. A ship laden scupper-deep with nitrates or copper ore, might do one thing; the same ship, half-immersed, presenting an infinitely greater wind-surface, might do another and totally different thing.

The men came down from aloft, grumbling. No eight-hour day for them with "walking time" deducted and the assurance of a home-fire or a snug corner in their favourite publics awaiting them at their labours' end. Conceivably, there'd be no blink of sleep for any one of them before the next dawn

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broke. There was a chance that if sleep did come it would be one from which even Mr. Perkins's bellowings would never waken them.

"Forrard, the port watch!" The mate led his hands to the forecastle head. The cook emerged from his galley and stood by the fore-sheet, the steward and the carpenter bearing him company. The second mate's watch stationed themselves at the weather main braces; the boys were ordered to the poop to handle the braces of the denuded upper yards, for even the wind-pressure on an empty spar tells in such moments as these. Up on the exposed poop, the sense of violent motion and stress of battle was more apparent than down in the waist. The sea looked very white and wrathful through the skeleton rails. The only glimmer of light was from the binnacle aft: it lit up the face of the helmsman—Rhys by this time—and the glistening, towering figure of the skipper.

Occasionally, as Captain Greegan bent to take a bearing of the various lights, his face was revealed: stern, almost ferocious. His every faculty was concentrated on victory. Thirty men's lives were in his two hands, together with a ship worth many thousands of pounds and a cargo worth many thousands more. His pay for this service was fifteen pounds a month, which, translated into present-day equivalents, means three pounds twelve a week—less than a dustman receives.

I saw the wheel spin in the trifling zone of light. There was a loud clapping of canvas, "Lee oh!" That was a tip to all hands to stand ready.

"Main topsail haul!" The second mate let the lee braces go with a rip, and, the wind now being fairly ahead, the main yards swung handsomely round to the eerie song of the men.

The *Ravenby* reeled and staggered in stays; the main yards came swinging round, the critical moment arrived. Would the ship stay: would she continue her headlong swing through the wind's eye, or would she fall "in irons" and require to be boxed off with the foreyards? That would pronounce the

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manœuvre a failure, and, by losing ground, place the ship in further jeopardy.

"Fore bowline!" "Starboard fore-braces!" Fore-tacks and sheet were let go, the eager men manned the braces. For breathless, countable moments the ship hung fire, drifting bodily down to leeward like a balloon.

"Flatten in your head-sheets!" was bellowed from aft. It was done. The foreyards were squared now, and the ship reluctantly took the necessary cant. One sensational flap from the forrard canvas, it filled as the yards were abruptly pointed; the *Ravenby* came round, flirted a stinging wisp of spray over the cathead, and then with a rush and a lift and a snort, she was up and away, hounding vigorously northward towards the dull loom of the English coast-lights.

One would have thought that enough had been done, but no——

"Take a reef in that foresail, Mister," sounded along the decks; the third mate the unwelcome messenger. The job was carried out somehow; the *Ravenby's* frolicsome movements eased somewhat, and a cry of "Grog ho!" followed.

The men filed aft, where, snugged in the companion doorway, the mulatto steward, who had obviously sampled the brew with a generous throat, was standing as a dispenser of delights. A bucketful of rum and water was at his feet—more water than rum—and as each man passed the doorway a pannikinful of liquor was thrust into his hand.

"Now, yo' don' go fo' to say yo' ain't got good stooard!" said the domestic, taking all credit to himself for the liquid largess.

The men mustered at the poop-break after their libations, in readiness for the muster. They were warmed by rum into good fellowship with all humanity. A little while before—Rhys leading them—they had been vociferously damning the ship's eyes for a plague-riddled workhouse, now—"I've knowed worse packets!" "Bai damn, I gone sail in schips vere yo' don' got no grog no time!" "Old man's a good sort,

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blast my eyes if he ain't!" and like compliments were heartily passed, for deep-water Jack is a creature of the moment, and cursed with no long, venomous memory.

The roll was called, name by name, and answered to a man. At the time I did not realize the significance of this ceremonial; but its reason was to ascertain whether any man had been washed overboard or fallen from aloft in the dark hours, or been left, crushed and helpless beneath a spar, there to die in slow agony. There's usually a sound reason for every windjammer formality, and "eyewash" ceremonial has little enough to do with it.

"What time is it?" someone asked. It was eleven o'clock in the first watch—the hours had fled rapidly, as they inevitably do when real hard work is toward. It's only the inactive, suspenseful hours that drag and crawl like paralyzed snails.

"The watches are aft, sir," the mate reported.

"Relieve the wheel and lookout; watch on deck keep aft, watch below keep handy for a call. Light the binnacle, one of you boys!" Shaw lit it, although it was his watch below. The other first-voyagers had slept serenely on through the whole tumultuous experience, and as no questions were asked concerning them, it seems their absence had passed unnoticed. Who'd give thought to a raw recruit when the veterans were vigorously at work?

It hardly seemed worth while turning in for the scant portion of the watch below remaining. However, Toby seemed to think that even a couple of crumbs were better than no loaf at all, and, doffing oilskins and sea-boots, rolled with a luxurious grunt into his bunk, puffing at his newly-lit pipe as he settled down. Almost at once he commenced to snore—as before, he dropped the pipe from his mouth, inhaled still warm ashes.

"Another earthquake!" he said, and slept and snored afresh.

We turned out again unrested, and—joy of joys—midnight coffee had been ordered; and there it was awaiting us, piping

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hot from the galley, brought into the half-deck by Tottie's own self, lest a first-voyager might spill our share. Good old Tottie—good old ship, good old skipper!

Getting into wet, cold oilskins was an ordeal; but, remembering sad experiences with unwieldy sea-boots, I shod myself with go-ashore shoes for the sake of greater handiness. Five minutes before eight bells Toby dowsed the light, sterling sailor that he was. "No use going out into the dark as blind as an owl," he said. There was much wisdom in his plan: often a man leaving a light cabin, to plunge on a pitch-dark deck, has found himself menaced by a big sea, and, before he could adjust his sight to new conditions, sustained serious injuries.

Precisely as eight bells sounded and we opened the half-deck door, the fore-upper-topsail split, and then the fun began! All hands were at it immediately: the topsail yard thundered down to the cap, shaking the fabric to her keel, and, as a general accompaniment to the infernal din, the loose water in the waist washed noisily from rail to rail at every wild roll. Chops of the Channel with a vengeance!

After a while the watch below was sent below and the deck-watch ordered aft, where we snugged ourselves between the harness-casks and to leeward of the chart-room; unfortunate Shaw was bidden to pace the lee-poop's after-end as an incentive to wakefulness, and pace it he did, stumbling as the ship stumbled through the growing smother, roaming wild to leeward, falling over extended legs— an action greeted with curses—alone in an unsympathetic world. In those days I did not appreciate the majesty of the storm or the worth of the discipline. I did not note the strenuous beauty of the impetuous fabric as she danced her giddy heel-and-toe across the snarling white-caps. That was to come later. But I found that I wasn't so scared in the open as I had been down below, and, too, the occasional wafts of talk from the deck-watch were heartening. Toby had found a virgin audience for the saga of his fractured femur, I gathered; Rhys appeared to be telling someone that story of the Geordie brig-skipper and the

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Shields barmaid; and as these men didn't appear to be afraid, why should I?

By two o'clock the gale had reached its height, as is generally the case. "Between twelve and two will show what the wind and rain can do," runs the sea-maxim. It was, indeed, blowing hard, but not nearly so hard as I've known it blow on other occasions. Quite hard enough, however, to drive the struggling *Ravenby* bodily to leeward; so that, at eight bells, all hands were ordered to put the ship about, there being sufficient sea-room, she was wore, not tacked: a slower and more tedious job, which kept us starbowlines out of our bunks until 5 a.m. So the eight-hour day that was then exercising the minds of landsmen, appeared an impossible dream to such as earned their bread on great waters.

In hard weather twenty-four hours were a nearer approximation of a seaman's average toil. And it was a proper work clear through!

But the gale blew itself out ultimately, as all gales must, leaving us a bit bemused, smothered in salt-water boils, and possessing a few dry rags amongst the lot of us. We commenced to set sail during the following forenoon watch, sending down such as was damaged and replacing it; the wind kindly swung round to the N.N.W., making a favourable breeze of itself; and presently the Channel was dropping astern; the loom of the twin-eyed Lizard lights persisting longest of all; and we were in open water with all the fuming Atlantic as our playground—or battlefield, as the luck of the game might go.

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CHAPTER IX

FLYING FISH DAYS

FINE weather brought a steady routine of work. There are always tasks for twice the number of hands a sailing ship carries, and the duty of the officers is to see that the multifarious jobs are performed, and further, since the average officer is equal to two men from a work point of view, to do at least four men's tasks in between whiles.

The ship had to be groomed below and aloft. Her decks were slimy with the water that had boarded us; holystones and sand were necessary to restore the planking to hound's-tooth whiteness. We consequently turned-to with holystones: each man supplied with a doubled bread-sack to kneel on—"hassocks" we called them—and a nubbly chunk of old red-sandstone: our "prayer-books" for this age-old ritual.

We went down on our marrowbones, and we stayed there for the entire four hours' watch: and whilst down we scrubbed—hard. Convicts of this century do less work in a day, I swear, than we did in an hour. Sand was flung carelessly down by the presiding officer; if it went into the scrubber's eyes, what odds? We scrubbed on, fingers raw and bleeding, lumbar regions one embodied ache, with a humorous officer sluicing water by the bucketful all around and about, drenching us and redrenching us; but we took a pride in making the planks we were toiling on whiter than those of our neighbours. And then, when the whole business was done, when wind and sun had dried the wood white as ivory, the mate smothered everything with tar and oil, that seemed to render the labour of a week or more of no more account than a casual lick of a crossing-sweeper's broom. But that's the way of sailormen at sea, anyhow.

Holystoning decks wasn't everything, however; after the initial spasm, we boys were kept down to this performance,

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and the trained A.B.'s were set to work aloft, repairing the havoc of the recent gale.

The gnarled old sailmaker, a Russian, and reputed a Nihilist, whose lean, leathery back was criss-crossed with scars from the knouts of those who had driven him into Siberian exile, and who had been shot through and through by Yankee bucko-mates, collected Rhys and Dobroff and Frenchy into his party; and this quartet, washed and clad in clean dungarees, sewed assiduously, watch by fine-weather watch, at the tattered canvas, making all things seemly against a bout of fresh bad weather. I heard much about and from "Sails" one way and the other, during the next few months. He used to shake his yellow fists at the peaceful sky and declaim against the autocrat tyranny of his native country that had driven him into exile. He was a man of education and, I think, of noble blood; but in his zeal he had sinned against the ruling powers, and his native land was forbidden him.

"Watch me—in leetle vhile," he said, "ter Tsar go phut—so!" This was accompanied by a telling sweep of his sailmaking knife—a razor-blade set in a beechwood handle. Then he would prophesy—but, as the tragic event proved, his prophecies, lurid enough to keep an imaginative boy awake in a prized watch below, fell far short of truth. Even Sails, embittered as he was against autocratic tyranny, never foresaw the bayonets of Russia's awakened proletariat seeking the sinless hearts of Russia's Grand Duchesses in that sordid murder scene in the dripping, nameless cellars of Holy Russia. Sails died—and I was witness to his passing—but I doubt if even his acrimony conceived such horrors as actually occurred.

Chafing gear in plenty was required, chafed rigging must be re-served. At odd times—in the four-to-six dog-watch, say—we boys made whole furlongs of this gear: clove-hitching short lengths of Manila rope-yarns into two lengths of spun-yarn, so that you had the effect of an exaggerated doormat, and this burlap was wound about all such shrouds and stays as were likely to receive the weight of a sail. There was also

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much rusted iron to be chipped and scraped and smeared with red lead. From the moment of her launching to that hour which sees her at rest in the Port of Missing Ships, a steel-built ship, whether steamer or windjammer, must be guarded against decay. You chip and you scrape and paint everlastingly; but, hard as you work, the rust is always a little ahead of you.

There were boats to be overhauled; stores had to be broken out and restowed; to say nothing of the actual handling of the ship herself in every shift of wind. There were, moreover, pig-pens and fowl-houses to be cleaned out daily; as reward for the latter service Captain Greegan, in an expansive moment, would order the steward to "kill one o' they sick hens and give it to they boys!"

There were few idle moments; none, if Mr. Perkins knew anything about it. But we settled down wonderfully well to the monotonous routine of toil, I think. And the days, broken as they were into the customary four-hour watches, passed like lightning.

There was, then, never any lack of work aboard the *Ravenby*. Some of the men displayed an aptitude for dodging the more strenuous forms of toil: Frenchy especially. Whenever work of a sweat-breeding kind promised, Frenchy inevitably went sick. There are certain recurring tasks that require the combined, "all-out" efforts of all hands. Bending fine-weather canvas is such a job—when all the spars must be stripped of their Number One sails and fitted with part-worn stuff that won't take much harm from the slamming and banging of the Doldrum calms and variables: bending sail is a frenzy of hard-driven toil that makes you sweat blood! Frenchy's complaint was obscure. Cape Horn fever, which is another name for Irish toothache, we called it, and cursed him heartily. Frenchy's ailment had no outward symptoms, but he related a record of pains that seemed to point to malignant cancer in an advanced stage—or worse. He had many inward symptoms. The skipper—our doctor—prescribed for these pains: the steward carried noxious doses forrard; it

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was whispered that Frenchy mightn't complete the passage; that a weighted strip of canvas would be his final winding-sheet. But after he deserted at Port Pirrie, with all the rest of the forecastle hands except only honest, hard-working Rhys, who himself suffered from advanced heart trouble and never mentioned it, and who was never late for a muster during the entire voyage, always first aloft and last down in bad weather, always forehanded on a rope—after Frenchy deserted I found in his bunk a much-worn copy of a pseudo-medical volume, in which the symptoms of obscure complaints were described in detail—and Frenchy had detailed practically all these symptoms!

But work passed the time. There wasn't much leisure: for one's personal tasks, such as washing oneself and clothes and living quarters, had to be done in the watches below. The system of watches meant that a man must be fourteen hours on deck the one day and ten the next—allowing for meals—all of which were eaten in the watch below—there was really no time for recreation. If we tried to write letters home in the shape of day-to-day diaries, the skipper had a disgusting habit of surprising us suddenly—his sennit-soled slippers making no sound—and dispatching us on unnecessary errands; in our absence he read our words and destroyed such as made mention of his austerity. He was the smallest-souled man I have ever met; lacking in humour or sportsmanship, mean beyond belief, a bully and a coward.

But somehow I got through all the Waverley Novels during that first outward passage, and one way and another, put in a lot of sound, useful reading—which was to stand me in good stead afterwards—mostly by stealth. I made a lamp out of a cocoa tin cadged from the cook; and when it was my forecastle look-out used always to take this lamp and a book forrard with me, and there, screened by the capstan, would read to my heart's content, when I ought to have been staring into blackness! For wild horses could not have prevented me from reading then—I was discovering the splendour of the written word.

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During night watches on deck we yarned—though chiefly we youngsters listened respectfully to the yarns of more experienced men than ourselves. "Sails," an all-day man, officially an idler, who slept badly because his dreams were haunted with memories of his exile and torture, told stories of his native Russia, which, but for the past revolution, must have been unbelievable, and which, at that day, we derided. Grim, sensational stuff it was, leaving Tolstoy and Dostoievsky far in the rear so far as realism was concerned. But he showed us the criss-cross weals of the knout in proof of his words, tearing down his shirt to do so; and his descriptions of the processions into Siberia were harrowing in the extreme. He himself had thrown a bomb at a bureaucrat; he had laboured in the quicksilver mines. He rapped his fingers on his shrunken gums to give force to his statements.

Rhys occasionally held the floor. What he had been and what he hadn't been, it is difficult to remember after this lapse of years. At the age of ten he had certainly been apprenticed to the master of a coastwise collier brig. I think he must have been born at sea—he could put in an eye-splice when he was five!—with a marline-spike in his fist instead of a silver spoon in his mouth. When he was fifteen, he was able-seaman aboard a semi-piratical ship, running contraband guns to Brazilian revolutionaries. He had deserted ship and tried his luck at the Australian gold-diggings, when you paid a sovereign for a bucket of fresh water; and, after washing your clothes and person in the rare fluid, used it for cooking purposes and for making tea.

Old Frenchy had served a spell in the Chilean navy, and claimed to have been present at that sea-battle when the Peruvian battleship, the *Huascar,* fought to a finish against the might of the younger republic. Probably Frenchy was telling lies—I feel sure he was—for much about the time he spoke of he seemed to have been rescuing convicts from Devil's Isle—but he certainly had all the details of that astonishing engagement, and the way he described the courage of the *Huascar's* cook—a Frenchman like himself—was a

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miracle of histrionic art. For, when the boarding party clambered aboard the riddled Peruvian, officerless and almost unmanned, the cook met them with the galley cleaver and clove the foremost to the chin: and it was worth losing an hour's sleep, precious though it was, to hear the blood-curdling talk. When he got drunk Frenchy claimed to be that identical cook.

Frenchy had the dramatic instinct strongly developed and was fond of describing the annual general parade of the Peruvian forces in the peaceful after-days, when the roll was called over by the senior general present.

"Picture the scene!" cried Frenchy—whose name I never knew—the tobacco-juice brown on his goatee beard. "Visualize it, if you can, though you cannot, being thickheads. The sentiment—the tragedy! The navy and the army drawn up in the hollow square there in the great plaza of Lima! A glitter of gold, and the sun shining on the fixed bayonets—ah! The precise movements of well-drilled men—drilled by French officers, observe! And we French are the world's soldiers, as we shall prove when the time comes to wreak rr-revenge on Pr-r-russia!" I cannot do justice to his blood-curdling "r's" and his flashing eyes. Actually he was one of France's bad eggs, but the spirit of patriotism always flamed hotly within him.

"There is a solemn hush after the bands have ceased their playing," he would go on, "and then—a clear voice calling muster. The first name spoken is the name of that gallant captain of the *Huascar,* who died in his shell-riddled conning-tower; who refused to surrender so long as he had life.

"And, after a pregnant silence, a high officer steps forward and salutes and cries: 'Absent, but accounted for. He is with the heroes!' Ah! that is fame, the fame I have hoped to win—I! And now I am able seaman on this starvation hell-ship." Big tears showed in Frenchy's eyes at this juncture. There was a general solemnity in the weather-beaten faces about, for the windjammer-sailor was a born sentimentalist. "A good tale—no!" said Frenchy. "Shaw, I observe you are

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moved to tears. Give me a plug of tobacco, also some matches."

Then Rhys would remember that he had been in the forecastle of a Yankee hell-and-damnation packet moored in the tiers at Valparaiso, with a cargo of lumber from Puget Sound, when the conquered *Huascar* was towed in as spoil of war.

"And every scupper of her dripping blood, believe you me!" he grumbled.

Great yarns were spun during those night-watches in fine weather. You'd hear about Bully Hayes and his doings in the coral seas—his blackbirding raids to the cannibal islands, his pearl-poachings, and his merciless handling of men: white and black alike. You'd hear of Bluenose mates and skippers, who hit men with belaying pins for fun and kept on hitting them. Consider for a moment, the make-up of the *Ravenby's* starboard watch alone, and its value as a forcing ground for romance.

Apart from Rhys, who had been everywhere, from the Arctic Circle to the South Georgia whaling stations by way of Nagasaki and Mobile Bay, where the chantying darkies screwed cotton into the holds of the Baltimore clippers during the days of America's mercantile glory; apart from Frenchy, who seemed to have seen everything Rhys failed to observe, there was Hassal, the Dutch West Indian negro—chocolate-coloured and blubber-lipped, who used to sing sentimental ditties in a voice as succulent as whale oil—and his parents had been veritable slaves: he himself being born into slavery. He had learnt the craft of the sea aboard Yankee hell-fire packets, where the second mate would shoot the hands one by one off a topsail yard if they didn't move quickly enough to please him. He had been doped with knock-out drops and shanghaiied more times than he could remember, he had been sandbagged along the 'Frisco waterfront, and wrecked on an iceberg south of the pitch of the Horn: and, after thirty chequered years afloat, he possessed little more than the clothes he stood in, but his oily laugh was loudest when trouble came thickest. There was Snowball, a Martinique negro, on whom charcoal must have left a pale mark, and there

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was Petersen, the stolid Finn, whose father owned a fleet of soft-wood schooners sailing out of Helsingfors, and who, himself, knew how to build a ship from truck to keel, and navigate her when she was launched and rigged. There was also the ordinary seaman, who, I have reason to believe, had only escaped jail for manslaughter by our skipper's favour—bought at a price, be sure.

Each of these men had seen and endured such wonders and hardships as leave the ordinary human soul gasping with amazement. These, then, with Toby, Jeffcott and Chicken, were my associates. Is it any wonder that the writing itch troubled me when the first fine frenzy of adventure was passed?

One day Mr. Sayle sent me down to his cabin to scrub it out and tidy it. In a corner of his bunk I found a dog's-eared copy of a magazine—a fiction magazine. They were not as common as they are now. This was treasure-trove with a vengeance. I bagged the journal as a matter of course. I do not remember the prose stories it contained. But there was some verse, "The Grave of the Hundred Dead," by Rudyard Kipling; and from the moment of reading this lilting measure I became an ardent Kiplingite, and I remain so to this day.

There is no need to tell of life as it was lived from day to day. The "dead horse" was duly worked off somewhere north of the Line; but there was no picturesque ceremony. The "dead horse" is the first month of a deep-water voyage, during which time the forecastle hands, having drawn a month's pay in advance, are working for nothing, according to their views of the matter. In some ships the passing of the "dead horse" was occasion for rejoicing; the skippers gave grog, there were sing-songs—but not in the *Ravensby*. We crossed the Line with the accepted ritual, and I, in common with other first-voyagers, was shaved and dowsed in a tank of water, and there was much larking and horse-play. We lingered for dreary days in the Doldrums, where our hands were blistered with much hauling of ropes, and where, thanks to deluging

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rains, we were enabled to wash our blankets; we picked up a vigorous South-East trade that gave us the sight of the Brazilian land ere we slanted away for Good Hope; and so flying-fish weather passed as a vague dream of the night, and almost before it was possible to realize it, we had sighted lonely Tristan d'Acunha, and were thrusting our way through the porchway or entrance to the Easting. And the Easting—as seen through the eyes of a first-voyager—certainly deserves a chapter to itself.

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CHAPTER X

RUNNING THE EASTING DOWN

GREY skies, grey-green seas, and an everlasting gale of wind, marrow-chilling cold, dampness and discomfort, extra work, and even more indifferent food than usual—that was the Easting in windjammer days. You ran under topgallant-sails if your skipper was a sail-dragger, because it was down the Easting that you made up for the lost time about the Equator. Captain Greegan had caused Mr. Perkins and the Nihilist sailmaker to make special royals on fine days: Number One canvas, with wire leeches and foot-ropes: and he avowed his intention of carrying these "heaven-disturbers" clear down the Easting-run.

Down the desolate waste that reaches from Good Hope to Leewin a westerly gale blows the whole year round. It is generally a full gale. To shorten the actual distance a Great Circle course is laid, because the farther south you go the fewer the miles you have to cross, but going south means an increase in wind and cold.

Captain Greegan went far south, so far, indeed, that we got mixed up with loose Antarctic ice. Our first iceberg was sighted just before dawn, thanks to the keenness of Rhys, on the look-out. He had served a term in whalers, and was learned in the mysteries of ice-blink and such phenomena of wintry seas. Rhys wasn't officially on the look-out—actually I was; but, he'd come up to the forecastle-head to keep me company: by way of repayment, I fancy, for my good offices in writing letters to his various lights-of love, for posting on arrival in Australia. My look-out was from 4 to 6 a.m., and I was newly turned out of a sweating bunk, with sleep still hanging on my eyelids. A poorer seaman than Rhys—and think what the owners got for their two-pound-five a month

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in his case!—would have coiled down on the sea-chests in the forecastle after the watches had been mustered aft, for a snooze. Until early coffee was served, there'd have been nothing to prevent his doing this—for it was his "farmer": which means, that during the watch he had neither wheel to take nor look-out to stand. But Rhys, by way of earning his meagre wage, thought it his duty to piece out my imperfections with his great knowledge.

"There's times when you can sleep in comfort on the look-out, Shaw," he informed me, sucking at his nose-warmer of a pipe, one claw-like hand over the bowl to prevent the sparks flying around; "but in 50° South is no place for slackness: especially in a starvation packet of this sort, where they won't burn the side-lights for fear of wasting oil."

I suppose I must have been indifferent to my responsibilities, for he suddenly commenced to put me through a catechism of nautical problems. Then he told me a pungent story that will not bear repetition, but which set me a-laughing and drove away the sleep from my eyes. His yarn reminded me of another, and when the laughter subsided he took advantage of my wakefulness to tell of good ships lost through the negligence of their look-outs.

"And likely as not, the second-mate aft is dreaming of a barmaid in Liverpool," he mentioned. It was a byword in the ship: Mr. Sayle's thickheaded sleepiness on his watch.

Thus the minutes passed: the *Ravenby* snorting through it like a liner out to break all records: for she was carrying a full press of canvas that had been piled on her in pyramids of power as soon as the last-watch squalls were over. Right to the royal trucks was she clothed in thunderous sailcloth; the favouring gale was three points abaft the beam, and that was her best sailing point: she could carry everything except flying staysails and gaff-topsail. The roar of her driving forefoot was an inspiring sound; the shimmer of white foam as the bow crashed up and down was dazzling through the thinning darkness, for day broke early down there in November month. The frapping of the reef-points on the rounded bosoms

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of the sails was for all the world like hysterical drums calling to the inevitable war of the wide seas.

There was little to be seen beyond the white-capped rollers racing up from astern and coming startlingly into view as they piled noisily about the forecastle rails. Overhead the scud raced furiously across the pallid stars. One seemed to hover on the brink of creation's first dawning: a sense of unreality and nightmare was all about. Forrard there we were as dry as a bone, although they'd rigged a canvas screen up aft so that the helmsman shouldn't be terrorized by the galloping seas that followed the ship. The *Ravenby* was carrying the press of sail that sprang from waterway to masthead in order to keep ahead of the greybacks that had known no check in their stride for six thousand miles or so.

"It reminds me," said Rhys, expectorating to leeward, "of the days when I was cook's mate of an Arctic whaler. There's a snap in the wind—— Hi; ice—ice right ahead!"

He let out the warning cry like the crack of a whip. "See the 'blink'?" he thundered against the ear-flap of my sou'-wester. "Now then—let 'em have it—hard a-starboard, tell 'em!"

"Hard a-starboard!" I screamed through funnelled hands.

"Weather main brace!" I heard faintly from aft. "Lay aft the watch—handily!" The *Ravenby* was put dead before the wind. You could feel the fretful swirl of the parted water beneath her galloping bow.

"There it is," said Rhys; "and now I'll be off." He slid down one ladder as Captain Greegan himself came storming up the other.

"You reported ice?"

"Yes, sir; there it is!" I stabbed with an energetic hand to where a dull, ghostly shimmer showed.

"Ice, by God! You're not as big a fool as I thought you were!" He patted my back, this autocrat who had no use for premium apprentices, and least of all for me! Not until this day have I told the exact truth of the matter: that it was Rhys who saw the ice and who conveyed the warning, and so

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saved the ship from being pitched on the spur of a berg whilst raging at twelve good knots an hour.

Sail was swiftly shortened. The *Ravenby* heading due north, streaked like a whipped cur from the ice-menace. Little groups of men clustered here and there, staring, exchanging opinions, as happens after the passing of a crisis; remembering other occasions when similar lucky escapes had chanced. Being merely a curious boy, I didn't realize that it was nip and tuck whether the ship would win clear of the spurs of the berg.

Seven-eighths of the bulk of an iceberg is submerged, and the under-water part throws out ridges for a distance of many fathoms from the main and visible portion.

However, by good luck we ratched clear, and dawn showed us the menace in detail: a four-hundred-foot high mass of green-blue ice, pinnacled and wonderful—at that distance showing more like a cloud, indeed, than a solid thing; but if our keel had so much as touched it there would have been no further word of the *Ravenby* beyond the ringing of the *Lutrine's* bell at Lloyd's and the announcement that the barque was listed as "missing."

There were other bergs after that: flat-topped fellows that measured three or four miles from one end to the other; bergs that looked like toys and which yet could have split the stoutest liner afloat into fragments. We ran full-sailed to the noisy gale in daylight between two of them, and hardly were we clear than they met with a crash, splintering into fragments and capsizing; but if we'd been a few moments later we must have been crushed like an eggshell and sent to Davy Jones's locker.

There were other hazards of travel. One following sea boarded us and, hitting the wheel, snapped off the stout teak spokes as if they were rotten carrots and threw the two helmsmen to the scuppers. Trouble enough then, with the deck-watch busy at the wheel-tackles, keeping the ship before the wind, whilst the carpenter and volunteers lashed handspikes to the remaining halfspokes, to give the new helmsmen some-

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thing to work with. Every man seemed to be driven by the urge of common fear, which is the finest discipline known to human kind.

So we endured through a nightmare of toil and discomfort. The carpenter was killed: his skull cracked like an egg-shell by a staysail-sheet-block that he had himself made in finer weather, and Petersen, the Russian Finn, took his duties. A solemn service, for the burial of the dead at sea, with the sheeted body lying on a grating and the bareheaded sailors standing by, the grey waves leaping hungrily to claim another of their victims, followed.

I've assisted in the burying of many since then: under shell-fire on the Western front; on passenger liners, too: I've recited what I could remember of the service over my own ship's casualties after action against enemy submarines; but give me a solitary sea-funeral down east of the Crozets for stark pity and loneliness.

One of the apprentices fell overboard forrard, and was washed back to safety on the poop, where he cursed the ill-luck that had caused him to lose his pipe, and clean forgot to be grateful for mercies rendered. A thousand things happened—trivial from our point of view, but momentous when judged by the ordinary safe standards. Rhys fell from aloft when reefing the foresail, and came to no harm, cannoning from the foresail's breast; another man, Pearson of the port watch, dropped off the fife-rail—a height of a bare four feet—and fractured his upper arm.

The after cabins were flooded feet deep because one sea beat in the saloon skylight as if it were paper and gelatine instead of solid teak and reinforced glass. A man deemed himself fortunate to get below at the end of a four-hour watch unharmed. A whole month in saturated garments made one pray for dry clothing and offer the cook anything for drying-room at the galley-fire.

Every hour brought its fresh adventure. Every change of watch brought a fresh problem. We shortened down to a goose-winged main-topsail, we set sky-scraping royals and

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flying stay-sails. We went aloft to replace damaged canvas, we went below to trim shifted cargo. We youngsters were chiefly concerned with immediate discomforts. That the ship was fighting for her life was the business of the afterguard. The rousing-out and bending of a new main-upper-topsail meant, to us, merely the loss of a watch below and extra labour: to the captain, the man we reviled with all the oaths of salt water, it meant the ultimate salvation of his ship. We grumbled because there wasn't any soup, say—thanks to a lurch pitching the soup-kettle through the lee-door into the scuppers; and we never troubled to think of the skipper's apprehensions as he felt the same lurch and wondered if the masts would stand up against the strain. Afterwards, when responsibility weighs heavily, when one realizes that he himself, unaided, must safeguard his ship's wellbeing, he understands the Gethsemane through which a shipmaster walks during heavy weather.

But it all ended at last. A bottle of rum was on offer to the man who first sighted land. All hands made excuse to be busy aloft during the daylight.

Windjammer navigation wasn't the exact science practised aboard a transatlantic flier. There was no wireless to time chronometers to the fraction of a second. We'd been four months from the last checking of the chronometer's rates; and anything might have happened during that time; the ship-clocks might have altered their daily rate—gained where before they had lost, or *vice versa*. A minute's error in the chronometer meant fifteen miles error in the ship's position. When making up for the land by night in thick weather, fifteen miles can spell all the difference between safety and disaster; and your deep-sea lead doesn't serve you very well when water shoals sharply from five-hundred-fathom water to five.

"Land ho!" yelled Larsen from the upper topgallant yard one evening towards sunset. "Two points port bow!" He got his bottle of grog!

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CHAPTER XI

UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

It was high land at the entrance to Spencer Gulf, and the worst of our troubles were over. We picked up a pilot at dawn the following day, and began a tedious beat up the gulf. Later, we secured a tug. Sunshine bathed us; presently the Australian midsummer heat became unbearable. When we anchored in the stream the ship's thermometer registered one hundred and seventeen in the shade. Next day we moved to our berth alongside a sun-bleached quay, where white-clad girls waved welcome to us—girls! The forecastle hands seemed keenly interested in these rare specimens; we of the half-deck at the moment were more interested in the hawkers of fruit and eggs and cigarettes, soft bread and chocolates.

Our pagan souls craved surcease from the monotonous fare of deep water. We had whiled away very many middle watches, crouched between the harness casks on the poop or beneath the covering of the chart-room, discussing the repasts we would devour as soon as our feet—almost webbed by this time—trod solid earth.

We acted up to our wildest dreams; for there was still money in our sea-chests. Some of us had received letters from home containing money-drafts. Let old-timers show keen interest in the fauna of this new land to which our ship had brought us; we wanted the sizzling of the well-filled flesh-pots and the odours of baking meats. So, on boiled eggs, and rare soft bread and quinces and other pleasing fruits—how keen the acid taste of them after the months!—we ate ourselves into a state of semicoma, in the intervals of work.

For we had to work, port or no port. We had maybe dreamed of halcyon days as soon as we reached the blessed

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land; dreamed of long rambles, of kangaroo hunts, even of encounters with aboriginal blacks. We'd spent many a dog-watch in furbishing up those cheap Belgian revolvers with which we'd provided ourselves in the event of encountering pirates or mutiny on the high seas! But we found that twelve solid hours' work per day was still expected of us, commencing at five-thirty in the morning, when, even then, it was as hot as the inside of a baker's oven on Monday morning, ending at 6.30 p. m.—half an hour for breakfast and half an hour for dinner sandwiched in between—and even then we unpaid ropehaulers had to cover the decks with sacks and drench them with water to counteract the blaze of the South Australian sun.

The actual twelve hours of daily work consisted of shovelling at the cargo. The thriftiness of the *Ravenby's* owners required that this toil should be done by men who might otherwise be leisurely employed in ordinary sailorizing tasks: refitting damaged rigging, repairing sails and the like. Stevedores in young Australia asked more for a week's work than our paid hands got in a month. Under a broiling sun, with a shade temperature approaching the one hundred and twenty mark, coke-shovelling is an excellent sudorific. The crew deserted the third day, as had been intended by the miserly wisdom of Captain Greegan. Desertion, according to the half-deck creed, meant the end of everything. These men had put in four months of strenuous toil, and had only received one month's pay in advance, together with such oddments of tobacco and soap and matches from the slop-chest as Captain Greegan could not avoid issuing to them. Notwithstanding the ship's indebtedness to them, they bolted, excepting Rhys and the carpenter: going overside at night, lowering their sea-bags into a boat belonging to some sophisticated boarding-house keeper, who was prepared to house them for a little while without payment, after which he would ship them aboard another craft, perhaps as harsh a workhouse as the *Ravenby*, at wages then current in Port Pirrie—perhaps eight pounds a month or thereabouts—on condition that he

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himself received their advance notes for a month's or two months' pay.

The cook and steward bolted; even the second mate and third mate went on the welcoming beach—the second mate having become enamoured of a tow-headed siren who presided over the beer-pump of a bar of questionable repute—but the officers were discovered and brought back, looking thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

The loss of the crew meant more work for us boys, naturally enough. We descended into the hells of the coke-holds, and shovelled and bagged and sweated—driven by a foreman stevedore who was paid to exact the last ounce of labour from his underlings. After work was over, we filled the donkey-engine tank, and wetted-down and arranged the yards to please Mr. Perkins's fastidious eye, afterwards arranging the she-oak net under the gangway, according to Australian port law.

The Australian authorities recognized at that day that sailors are particularly human. She-oak beer, the common Australian beverage, was a potent tipple, although of the delay action variety. A man might drink copiously of the stuff for quite a long time and feel no evil effects, until an hour or so afterwards. He could leave for his ship in a perfectly sober state, and reach the wharf to which his ship was tied in such a condition that he was unaware whether he was a windjammer sailor or an animated headache. He was in such a mood that he was inclined to walk across gang-planks that weren't there. Consequently, under each ship's gangway was draped a stout net of rope, stretching from string-piece of wharf to ship's rail, capable of holding as many human bodies as were likely to be netted in any one haul. Many lives were thereby saved. On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, Chicken Robinson and myself retrieved from the common trawl Captain Greegan himself! Being only human, we contrived to mix up our commander with the washing-down operations. He breathed thickly through his nose during that time and took no interest in our endeavours. He was indif-

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ferent to all things as we wrung him out and bore him below —fulfilling our duties as by our indentures laid down. He had been celebrating safe arrival in port with fellow-skippers, and had an ordinary luggage label tied into the lapel of his shore-going jacket, on which was inscribed in bold hand-writing that he was Captain Patrick Greegan of the barque *Ravenby,* and would anyone finding him be good enough to return him to the written address! Real sailorly forethought!

So daylight hours were fully occupied; but, after our regular work and the incidentals, we were happily placed in that, like the London horse-bus driver, we " 'ad the rest of the hevening to ourselves." Alluring feminine figures paraded the wharf in the gloaming. Australian glad-eyes were as powerful as native-born English invitations. There's always been hospitality displayed by Colonials to such as use the seas—dating back to emigrant days, when the arrival of a sailing ship was a noteworthy event, and when newly-settled families remembered kindly those who had brought them to their heart's desire. Sometimes—but this was only on Sunday and in broad daylight—the girls would venture aboard our ship and admire our quarters, bringing flowers to brighten them, sitting on our sea-chests and darning our socks and jerseys, or patching our woeful shirts. All that was asked in return was that a boy should don uniform cap and coat and parade Port Pirrie's only street in company with the female enchantress, in proof, to her sisters, that she possessed sufficient charm to ensnare a British sailor. These mild flirtations were innocent enough. The Australian flapper of that day was well able to take care of herself; if anyone, presuming on a casualness that was foreign to one brought up amongst the then-stricter conventions of England's town and villages, ventured too far, he was very properly subjected to violent handling by Australia's young manhood. Some such drastic code was undoubtedly necessary, for the small port was occupied at that time by at least twenty sailing ships, all of them carrying numbers of half-grown men who had probably never been taught respect for

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feminine purity; and sailormen at sea, like single men in barracks, don't grow into plaster saints.

There really wasn't very much to do ashore in Port Pirrie: a trifling town, consisting of tin houses and sheds and sand, in those days. It was the outlet port for the Broken Hill mines; and on our second voyage there, a year or so later, we secured a full cargo of manganese ore for Antwerp. On this first visit, however, we were informed, after much secrecy —and heaven alone knows why that secrecy was maintained —that we were to load flour for ballast and go to Newcastle, N.S.W., there to secure a cargo for an unknown port—probably 'Frisco. We very much wanted to go to San Francisco, for we'd heard a lot about its attractions.

But our further voyaging was still enshrouded in that mystery which afflicted a windjammer of the *Ravenby's* type. I could understand the captain being reluctant to disclose the ship's position on the high seas—never once did I see a chart marked off with the day's reckoning during all my years aboard the barque—for, as likely as not, he was as uncertain of the ship's actual place as we ourselves were; but this tardiness in disclosing a future destination, long after it was known to the afterguard, has always astonished me, so much so, that when in my first steamer, the captain came aboard after visiting the shore and announced to all hands our future port, I nearly fainted!

However, the future didn't matter. I was at that time in the throes of my first genuine love affair: the sweetest and purest idyll, maybe, that I have ever known. Its details have no place in this narrative. I think I was of the melancholy school in those days, for I remember walking my enslaver to the local cemetery and outlining to her—she was only fifteen —the inscription I would wish placed on my grave in the event of my early death. Two and a half years later I met her again. She was elaborately painted and powdered. She was daringly attired. She was promenading George Street, Sydney—one of the terrible night patrol. Any man's sweetheart then, but not mine.

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Some distance from Port Pirrie proper, along a sandy road bordered with sheep and cattle that had died as a result of the drought, a saloon by the name of the "Pilot Boat" was situated. It was a genuine sailors' and lumpers' dancing-den, where refreshments were supplied to all such as could pay for them. Female decoys were sent out every evening to parade the wharves and invite the crews of the many ships to visit the "Boat." A horse-drawn bus rounded up at the wharf every evening after knock-off time, and a leather-lunged conductor was in the habit of bawling like a foghorn: "Any more for the blooming 'Boat'? Any more for the blasted 'Boat'?"

When the crews had nothing better to do they donned shore-going kit: inch-thick pilot cloth for the most part, in that grilling temperature, with gaudy woollen mufflers about their throats; and, cramming iron-hard bowlers on their heads, accepted the invitation. They had to pay their bus fares at the end of the journey, although no mention of a charge was made whilst they were being shepherded into the crazy vehicle; and on arriving at the "Boat" were entitled to dance with ultra-respectable girls, play mild card-games and drink —always at their own expense. They were also expected to pay the shot for their dancing-partners' refreshments, which was only natural, as they secured a commission on all sales traced to their influence. A night at the "Pilot Boat," on ordinary occasions, was a depressing affair enough. There was a great deal of drinking, there was some indifferent dancing; and we had a suspicion that gambling was carried out in a back room to which apprentices were not admitted.

Even in those days—before the first breath of war had curdled the air—there was much rivalry between the crews of British sailing ships and the crews of German windjammers that frequented the port. All the latter were manned, from captain to cabin-boy, by Germans. There were occasional fights in the one dusty, stifling street of the shabby town, between Britishers, so-called, and Germans. On a memorable night the word ran along the water-front like lightning that

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the Germans had taken up a position in the "Boat," and refused entry to all save men of their own race. It was the bearded, elderly mate of the *Star of Italy* who spread the news. He commenced at his own gangway, and a crowd gathered about him. In five minutes he had sixty or seventy men thirsting for action. Rhys, suffering from heart-trouble and rheumatism as he was, was amongst them. So were we boys.

"Going to stand it?" demanded the *Star of Italy's* mate. There was no bus available, so we formed up into a semi-orderly procession, pushed the solitary policeman, who asked what we were up to, into the only wet ditch for twenty miles, and trudged onwards. Our numbers were added to as we progressed. Philanderers deserted their doxies and came towards us from the shadows. By the time the lights of the "Boat" hove in sight our leader must have had more than a hundred men behind him.

"Well, then: what about it?" demanded the *Star of Italy's* mate. We went forward: to be greeted by a shower of empty bottles. After that the fight began. We entered the "Pilot Boat" as best we could, by windows and doors. The front doorway being too narrow to admit a solid phalanx, we carried its frame with us. The dancing girls screamed and fled. The chuckers-out attempted resistance, but they had no earthly chance, for we had old scores to settle, and mob-madness was troubling us. One way and another we made a fairly clean sweep of the opposition. My most vivid memory of the whole sad scene is of seeing Rhys, driven to his knees, fighting, blue-faced and panting as he was, with two husky young Germans, each armed with beer-bottles as clubs; *and Rhys got away with it.*

No one was actually killed. I am no lover of fighting, preferring the peaceful paths and shunning danger; but I confess that fight was one to remember, and the memory of it fetches sinful tinglings to the nerves and heat to blood that is slowing in its flow. The elaborate German boatswain of a four-masted clipper was thrown in amongst the bottles behind the bar—they shone like jewels—like any sack of shakings!

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The "Boat" itself was so wrecked as to prevent its reopening during the remainder of the *Ravenby's* stay in port. But, when the tumult and shouting died down, our leader made a hasty eight bells muster and demanded: "Going to stand these square-heads' sauce? Say, you perishing lime-juicers, what about their ships?" That was enough. We marched back to the wharf. We boarded the ships lying there; lowered their boats and pulled off to other German ships lying in the stream. We cleaned all those ships up scientifically, forecastles and cabin alike, chasing the occupants about the decks and up the rigging until they could not call their souls their own. Then we mustered triumphantly ashore and sang "Rule, Britannia," and afterwards went to bed—most of us in the she-oak nets of our own or stranger ships! A most discreditable performance!

But, ah me! the times that were!

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CHAPTER XII

THE WEST COAST

FROM Newcastle, N.S.W., we took forty-five toilsome days to cross the stormy Pacific, running far south in search of favouring winds. That middle passage is vaguer in my mind than any other, for some reason I cannot determine. Chamberlain and Rhys stand out most vividly in my recollections —both of them sterling men, who, by force of example, contrived to keep the rest of the crew orderly when the afterguard lost control of them.

We had shipped a coal-black Barbadian negro as cook; a long-whiskered, tallow-faced food-snatcher as steward, in place of our mulatto and my namesake; and the food was impossible of description. Once I saw the steward hastening aft, whiskers streaming, his mouth wide open, and behind him the entire starboard watch pelting him with gouts of rancid salt meat, and swearing death and damnation.

It was customary when in bad weather, in high latitudes, to serve hot coffee at midnight. For a steward who possessed the idea of gratitude we boys were accustomed to take the cabin coffee-pot forrard to the galley, make the coffee there and take it aft to the waiting steward, to save him the risk of a drenching. In return the steward would recompense us with buttered cabin biscuits or wedges of cabin pastry; perhaps—rare morsel—a chunk of cheese. But the white-whiskered domestic had no bowels of compassion. The first night coffee ordered, I, having the first watch, naturally went to the pantry for the coffee-pot, and the ship being a-swill with whole water and rolling her yard-arms to the sea on either side, carried it to the galley, where the coffee was made and carried aft.

"Here you are, steward!" I told the snoring servant;

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"here's the cabin coffee!" The mulatto had always aroused and grunted an indication where the lagniappe was to be found.

"Set it down!" said this one. No mention of reward!

"Yes; but don't you understand?" I patiently said. "It's the coffee; the cabin coffee!"

"Set it down, blast you!" he rumbled. "And get out o' this!" So I set it down. It was very wrong; but—I set that coffee down in liquid form over his hairy chest and whiskers, threw the emptied coffee-pot at him as he leaped from his bunk, and fled. After that he fetched his own coffee, and we made matters as difficult as possible for him. A rope stretched across the foot of the poop ladder, say; a sudden rush as he went staggering aft with his coffee-pot, and the steward spluttering in the scuppers; a belaying pin skimming along the deck as he nursed the cabin eggs and bacon aft at breakfast-time; and always an eager youth waiting to catch the dish from him as he fell—we ate the eggs and bacon before he could pick himself up and exhaust his curses!—one way and another he lost heavily by his parsimony.

We were a thoroughly disgruntled crowd when we sighted the South American land. In many respects the ship was like a bear-garden; and we knew that Captain Greegan and Mr. Perkins were drinking to keep their courage up. The crew being discontented, we apprentices had to perform their work; and so we felt we hated the afterguard more than ever. I should not have been in the least surprised had open mutiny broken out. But Rhys told me that he'd warned the rest of the crew of the character of the Chilean jails—he'd served a spell in one or two of them—and somehow there was no actual outbreak.

So that when the becalmed ship drifted into the backwash of the noisy breakers to the southward of Cape San Antonio, and threatened to go ashore, there was no panic.

The *Ravenby* was helpless in the mazy currents that run along the Chilean coast. All the box-hauling in the world couldn't save her. She was too big and cumbersome to be

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towed by the boats. Captain Greegan got comprehensively intoxicated. So did the mate, so did the second mate. So did the steward, and, leaving his keys abroad, so did the cook and some of the crew. An anchor was let go, in over fifty fathoms of water, with a harsh, rocky bottom. It dragged; and the carpenter informed the mate of the fact. Mr. Perkins passed the word to Captain Greegan. In that flat calm we boys in the halfdeck could hear every word that was spoken on the near-by poop.

"Dragging, is she?" said Mr. Perkins, and went forward. The anchors were catted and billed outside the forecastle rail, and could be released by the mere pulling of a lever. The mate forgot to warn the carpenter that he was about to let go the starboard anchor; the carpenter had not applied the windlass brakes.

Mr. Perkins pulled the lever and the anchor fell—sheer down through fifty-fathom water. It made a noise big enough to fetch us boys from our quarters. The windlass presented an awe-inspiring spectacle. The monstrous chain-cable was tearing over it madly, sparks and shows of mud were leaping to the overhead beams. The carpenter made gallant efforts to reach the brakes; he was beaten back.

"Mon," said Scotty, turning a placid quid, "if that hit a mon it'd break his pipe!" We laughed, and whilst we laughed the cable ran out to the bitter end: the shackle connecting it to the keelson snapped like packthread and the last link clashed overside through spurling-gate and hawsepipe.

"All gone!" roared the assembled crowd in chorus.

"All gone it is," said Mr. Perkins unconcernedly. His mind was too magnificent to trouble with trifles by this time. "Make it so."

"Still dragging, sir," reported the carpenter.

"Ay, ay, Chips, ay, ay!" The mate went aft. "Still dragging, sir," he informed the captain.

"My God, my God—let go the other anchor!" raved Captain Greegan.

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"Gone, sir—chain, too!" observed Mr. Perkins. "Could you lend me a match?"

By this time the fume of the backwash was all about us. So far as we could see there was nothing to hold the *Ravenby* back from drifting on to the evil rock-fangs. There was no shore station to see our distress signals.

The crew formed into a body and marched aft. The fate of the ship mattered very little to them: they were chiefly concerned with their own safety.

"Time ye thought about abandoning her, cap'n," the spokesman shouted. That spokesman was not Rhys: danger always found him alert, active but silent. It was one of the pier-head jumpers. Rhys drew my attention to the remaining cable, and sure enough as I placed my hand on it I felt it leap and shake to the drag of the ship on the impotent anchor. No question about it: the danger was imminent!

"Get the life-boats ready, then!" said the captain.

It required a considerable amount of labour before the life-boats were ready for lowering. But the two life-boats were got off their chocks, where they'd been petrified by coat after coat of paint, and lowered in their protesting tackles into the water.

"Plenty of time—each man take a change of clothes," Captain Greegan ordained.

The mate summoned me to convey his change of clothing from his cabin to the port life-boat. It was contained in a brand-new and handsome portmanteau. I stowed it away with the care such a treasure deserved, and then collected belongings of my own—all hands did likewise. The shakings of the ship as the useless anchor dragged across the pitiless rocks at the bottom was an unpleasant sensation.

The fretful hiss of the breakers' backwash formed an undertone of sound and the world appeared a lonely, lonely place. But it was nothing like the shipwrecks of fiction. Men laughed and remembered quaint stories, far from seemly; there was no particular apprehension. There'd be no adven-

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tures on desert islands: nothing much beyond a long trek across rough country until we reached Valparaiso. I heard a somewhat acrimonious discussion between two of the men as to the respective qualities of the beer supplied in two places of refreshment: one in Shanghai, the other in Bootle! The whole thing was unreal, like the bizarre happenings of a dream.

After what seemed an eternity: "Hands, abandon ship!" said the skipper. We did so; as if going into the boats for a pull ashore. The captain made no suggestion of remaining to go down with the ship he loved. He cursed her for a lop-sided——that would neither stand sail, steer nor anchor, as he seated himself in the sternsheets of the starboard boat. Yet our most popular song, on the outward passage, at any rate, had been: "And I'll go down in the angry sea with the ship I love!" Real life seldom comes up to romantic fiction, I've found; but when it does it surpasses it!

"Best stand-by and watch the finish," Greegan shouted. Almost as he spoke there was the vague whisper of a breeze; the listless sails above us flapped.

"The land breeze!" someone said.

"Get aboard and try her again," said Captain Greegan. So we went back aboard and the whisper became a moan and then a strong, vigorous rush of air. Laying a hand on the cable there was no longer any harsh rumbling; the weight of wind was checking our drift. The wind came away with increasing freshness; dead off the land which was our enemy.

"Oh, come on; let's get to hell out of this!" said Mr. Perkins. And, to make short of a long matter, we trimmed the yards, manned the capstan, and lifted the remaining anchor off the ground. The breeze blew us away—out of the menace of that curdled backwash. The ship was laggardly, however, though when dawn came she was more or less safe; the blue land receding from view. The captain and mate went below for rest, leaving the second mate to restore the ship to orderliness. The first task falling to us was to heave in the thirty

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fathoms of cable that still were pendent from our hawse pipe —no wonder the ship was reluctant!—the next to get the boats hoisted aboard.

"Shaw," said the second mate; "pass the mate's portmanteau down." It was done. "Let's see what his notion of a change of clothes might be," Sayle said, and opened the notable luggage. There was nothing inside beyond a bottle of brandy and another of port, both wrapped in a dirty shirt!

By nightfall we had drifted out of sight of land, but, the breeze dying down, we drifted back; so there was a repetition of the previous alarums and excursions. But we collected a proper breeze about midnight; and dawn found a Valparaiso tug smoking towards us, and within an hour or two we were safely at anchor in that noble bay.

Certain of us boys were detailed off to row the skipper ashore. It was whilst awaiting his return to the boat that I made the acquaintance of my first beachcomber. Curious to see a foreign port I climbed the steps of the white mole, exactly as I was—in shirt, dungaree trousers, belt and sheath-knife—I was touched on the shoulder, a husky voice rumbled in my ear: "Say, sonny, you cover that knife, else there'll be trouble." A withered, unshaven individual was at my elbow. He spoke English.

"What do you mean?" I wanted to know. He explained, always huskily, with a flavour of alcohol, that it was against the Chilean law for any man to walk abroad carrying weapons. My sheath-knife was most like a bit of notched hoop-iron, and could not have cut anything more formidable than butter.

"They'll give you a fortnight in the calaboose, sonny," my friend in need added. "Stow it under your shirt—here's a *vigilante* coming." I did as I was bid, and very uncomfortable the knife was, I admit, thrust between my skin and my shirt.

"That tip ought to be worth the price of a drink," said my beachcomber. "Got a few centavos to spare, young 'un?"

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I had, and in gratitude for safe delivery from jail I handed them over. They weren't currency—only English shillings; but they served their turn.

"I wasn't always this sort of washout," said my friend. "You mightn't believe it, but I was once captain of one of those coastwise liners. It was a woman dragged me down." And afterwards I found he spoke the truth. He had been commander of a liner—he'd served his time with Green's—he had come of a decent English family. He'd simply drifted—all on account of some light-o'-love. His home was in a vault in the city cemetery; he lived a hand-to-mouth existence by battening on stray sailors ashore. Just a fragment of human flotsam overborne by a workaday world and his own weaknesses—amongst which was an enormous capacity for self-pity.

One might write a complete book about beachcombers, and startle the fictionists out of their senses. I have met the breed in various corners of the world—most of them, I regret to state, British. They are all victims of an inflated egoism, borne down under a weight of self-pity; and ninety-nine out of a hundred of them are alcoholics. I met one who'd been a member of that desperate gang which made South American history during the war between Chile and Peru; when, short of men, the general officer concerned formed an impromptu pressgang and rounded up all the beachcombers of the different ports and gave them their choice between life-long imprisonment and fighting Chile's enemy. They accepted the alternative and—a ragged two hundred—went forward with the bayonet during a battle and won victory for Chile. They fought throughout like furies, advancing when the Chilean conscripts were retreating, and actually, although it is not recorded in the official annals, gave Chile pre-eminence in Western South America. And, so the yarn goes, their corpses, preserved by the nitrates, still lie unburied in the wild foothills of the Andes.

We got orders after a lapse of days, during which we were not allowed ashore and so I saw nothing of Valparaiso. The

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orders were: Iquique to discharge cargo, and after that—the Lord of the Seas alone knew where. We bought another anchor and cable to replace that we had lost, and proceeded northward. In due course we arrived at Iquique—surely one of the places God forgot to finish!—and there we moored in the tiers. Three good miles separated us from the actual port; but there were ships by the dozen moored about us, ahead, astern, on either side; sailing ships all, and ninety per cent. of them British, which showed that in those days the British Merchant Service dominated the trade routes of the world. Last year I was told by a skipper that he had visited forty-six ports on the coast and seen no single windjammer! We were to discharge our present cargo ourselves, since shore-labour must have cost money. During a dozen weeks in Iquique the average daily program was as follows—so far as we of the half-deck were concerned:

4 a. m.: boat's crew turn out, clean boat, proceed ashore for tallymen—a three-mile-long pull. Collect tallymen, proceed back aboard the *Ravenby,* calling on the way at each ship that had come from North America, in order to secure a few edible biscuits. 5.30 a. m.: land tally clerks aboard *Ravenby,* gulp down tepid if not stonecold coffee. 6 a. m., turn-to at shovelling coal. 8 a. m.: thirty minutes' interval for a sketchy and unsatisfactory breakfast. 8.30 a. m.: turn-to afresh at the coal. "Digging down" was a purgatory. We were expected to supply so many tons of coal per diem to the waiting lighters—there was trouble and threat of demurrage if we didn't—but to dig down was no easy matter, since the shovels couldn't bite on the filthy stuff. Consequently we had to be driven. Any man who so much as paused for a breathing space to wipe the sweat from his face, was promptly assailed by foul language, calculated to act as a spur. The coal had to be shovelled into sacks, each sack had to be sewn up, six sacks went to a sling, and each sling was weighed at the gangway, under the eyes of the tally clerks. Four men and boys went to each shovelling gang—one to hold the sack open, three to shovel; the sailmaker and carpenter racing

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from gang to gang to sew up the filled sacks. Pretty hectic work, since Mr. Perkins chose his favourite from each gang to act as sack-holders; and never was a boy amongst the selected. The donkey-engine was used to heave the slings to the upper deck and fuel for the donkey boiler was filched from the cargo, since we were run on thrifty lines. That meant that, every evening after the lanchas had left the crew must man the head-pump and pour honest sea-water into the cargo, that its weight might counterbalance our pilferings. 6 p. m. was the official time for ceasing work; but if a *lancha* happened to be half laden at that hour—well, you couldn't expect it to depart half filled, so you went on shovelling.

Fresh water was at a premium. It seldom if ever rains in Iquique. Drinking water was supplied to Iquique by schooners from the south, and cost a fabulous price; as a consequence, we were restricted to the deep-sea ration—three quarts per man per day. This left nothing over for washing, so we formed the habit of plunging overboard, as we were, in singlets and trousers, for a swim, as soon as the last lighter left. We were, it should be remembered, as hard as nails: trained fine. We vied with one another as to who should perform the most daring diving feats; we leaped from the mainyard, from the topsail yard, ay, even from the topgallant yard. Then, returning aboard, we washed our clothes as well as we were able, donned the clothes washed overnight, and sat down to supper—biscuits, marmalade and tea.

We boys had to put the tally clerks ashore: another three-mile pull, then three miles back.

Returning aboard we were generally required to pull the captain ashore or to some other ship, and await his pleasure; which meant that we seldom saw our bunks—after at least fourteen hours of the most strenuous labour imaginable—before midnight. Then—four o'clock again, and the inevitable turn-out call. Of course, being boys and on the top of our form, we made light of it—and I think it seems worse in the retrospect than it did in the actual happening. We raced

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other ships' boats ashore, pulling like devils: going all out for terrific bursts. It was a strenuous care-free life we lived in those days. Surf days, when the northerly swell ran too fiercely for the lighters to lie alongside the ship, were holidays for most of the other vessels in the tiers, but we were set about various employments, lest we might stiffen in our muscles and grow lazy. The punt was got overside; we scrubbed the barnacle-smothered plating below the waterline as the ship rose. We painted, we chipped iron rust; we scaled the interior of the ship and added the rust-scale to the cargo, to such effect that it weighed out seventy tons heavier than when it had come aboard, though some of that was undoubtedly due to the water we'd pumped into the holds. Sundays being days of rest, we scrubbed down, polished the brass work and generally tidied the ship, prior to attending the missionary service aboard the *Star of Italy,* chosen as Bethel ship by the American missionary at Iquique, whose pretty daughter used to play the portable organ on the ship's poop, and with whom we susceptible youngsters all fell in love.

Great services they were: with much lusty hymn singing of the Sankey and Moody variety—"Throw out a life-line"; "Pull for the shore, sailor"; "Hold the fort, for I am coming"; "Lights along the shore"—these were our favourite hymns; and then a five-minute heart-to-heart talk by the decent missionary—whose nautical similes sometimes fell short of perfection from our critical standpoint. "When you're sailing up the Channel," he said, on one such Sabbath, "whether by night or day, and you see the lights of old England shining bright——" Then he looked pained because an irresistible wave of laughter shook us of his congregation!

When service was over we boys stole precious minutes to yarn with the *Star of Italy's* boys in their half-deck under the poop, where they had teakwood bookcases and an ordinary seaman to serve them as perpetual Peggy, although they paid smaller premiums than we had paid; nibbling rare, palatable 'Frisco biscuits lavishly smeared with real salt butter out of

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bona fide tins—and human nature being what it is, we stood up for our ship as if she were the most perfect afloat! Great days, those; when, the arguments waxing heated, we went out on the deck, and, forward of the foremast, fought the matter out to a finish—ship against ship—regardless of the fact that the crumbs of our opponents' biscuits still hung at our mouth-corners!

But the missionary's lovely daughter was the magnet, I fear: she was young, a girl—something as rare to our eyes as the sight of green stuff to a desert ranger. Toby, who was at that age when women seem the most desirable thing in life, fabricated a scheme for closer acquaintance with this girl, whose very name I have forgotten.

"They say, Shaw," he said to me mysteriously, "that if you go ashore to afternoon service at the Bethel church, the padre'll ask you to his house to tea. First liberty day we get, you and I'll go. She's sure to be interested in my leg. That girl's a wonder!" Toby had left Newcastle in a state of suicidal mania because of a girl there who'd allowed him to hold her hand on the veranda o' nights!

But liberty days were not so common. Not until the last ounce of cargo was shovelled from the holds, not until the last sling of sacks had been chanteyed overside into the lighter, was there any hint of shore-leave. Six solid weeks we'd spent beneath a grilling sun—the average daily temperature was about 100° F.—with no alleviation whatsoever, beyond swimming and sing-songs in the evenings. But, cleared of our cargo, the word went round that the following Sunday would be liberty day for the port watch. We starboard watch were required to bide our time. The only share we had in that tamash was manning the oars to pull the men and boys of the port watch ashore—each of these having been supplied with the Chilian equivalent of five shillings wherewith to enjoy himself. The port watch arrived aboard late that night in a state of intoxication. It was a wonderful result for five shillings a man! There were fights, of course as there was much noise; and one man was knocked down the forehold,

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where he lay groaning until Chicken and myself went down and patched him up, using dunnage wood and strips of our pyjamas for the purpose, after which we hoisted him on deck, and took the boat ashore for the doctor, who, returning with us complimented us on our handiness and said the man would do very well until the next day, and could we find him something to drink? Which we couldn't although we made an exhaustive search.

Captain Greegan developed a habit of staying late ashore or aboard other ships, keeping us in attendance until the small hours; and I remember on one occasion he filled the gig with Spanish monks, not one of whom could speak a word of English, and he himself could speak no word of Spanish and brought them aboard for supper and in their company spent a lively evening; with the boys to carry the guests to the boat and put them ashore at 2.30 a. m.

Our Sunday came. This was our reward for seven weeks' toil succeeding another seven weeks of sea-going without sight of land—the privilege of a few sparse hours on solid land with five shillings apiece to spend! Now, my observation during my later naval service was that if a man were deprived of shore-leave for so long as two consecutive days, he considered he had a grievance. He also had a right to draw such pay as was due to him to date and spend it. We, after three months' isolation, were granted freedom from two o'clock in the afternoon until seven at night, and were told, on going aft to receive our pocket money, that we might count ourselves lucky to get even that much, which, of course, our fathers paid for us when the settling day arrived.

A lot we cared! It was a blazing tropical Sabbath; shore temperature about 110° in the shade. There was hardly a green thing to be seen—little beyond stacks of bagged saltpetre and coal everywhere. The land was as parched as the Sahara; the *vigilantes* wilted in their uniforms. Most of the liberty men went headlong towards the drink-shops and the shameful streets—of which latter the Iquique of that day probably boasted more than any other town of equal size

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in the entire world—but: "The Bethel for us," Toby said. He limped along, I meekly attendant, until we reached the little church. The service was almost due to begin. It was very hot, and our uniforms, packed for many weeks in none-too-dry sea-chests, stank to high heaven of mould and fustiness. A few of the British-American colony drifted in. The missionary preached—a semi-political sermon that lasted—we timed him by the clock over his head—forty-five desperate minutes. After that an attempt was made to convert us; we were invited to the penitent stool. No suggestion of an invitation to tea at the parsonage, however. And, in our zeal, we'd deposited the greater part of our liberty money in the collection plate, hoping thereby to buy the parson's approval! Ultimately we found ourselves outside under a scorching sun.

"Oh, hell," said Toby; "no wonder men get drunk. Come on, Shaw!" Our conversion went by the board!

That was all I saw of Iquique during that voyage. We did hear, however, that Toby's divinity was about to be married to an employee of the North and Jewel firm; and, anyhow, we might have spent our time to much worse advantage. Certain of our shipmates undoubtedly did. Let's draw a discreet veil over their experiences.

* * * * * * * * *

We loaded saltpetre for Hamburg after a lengthy wait in Iquique Roads. Our hopes of completing our time in one voyage were dashed on the head. Most of the crew deserted shortly prior to sailing, sculling themselves ashore in a life-boat, which they promptly sold. They got drunk on the proceeds and were arrested, bought out of limbo by the skipper, who docked their pay of the amount of the fines he paid and the worth of the life-boat, and brought them back aboard.

A British sloop-of-war, of the old-fashioned type, came into the harbour: a thing of beauty. Stories went about that she —a wooden vessel armed with half a dozen muzzle-loading guns—had issued an ultimatum to the President of one of the Pacific Republics and trained her guns on the Government

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buildings as an added threat. Chamberlain swam across—I with him—and discovered that a friend of his family was first lieutenant aboard. That first lieutenant, viewing us in bathing dress, not only invited us to his cabin for refreshment, but said he'd like to return the visit. We issued a cordial invitation: but when he boarded us—spruce in tropical uniform, with sword and helmet complete, Chamberlain and I were busy handling the scrounged coal from the forepeak, and dirty to correspond.

"My God!" said the Navy man when he saw us, and fled. That was probably the impression he retained through life of the merchant service: of two ragged, smeared, work-toughened wastrels, who would have disgraced any convict hulk. At least, during my naval experience, I discovered that the viewpoint of the average naval officer was similar to what his must have been when he set eyes on us.

Chamberlain and I were deputed to convey certain sacks of looted coal aboard a ship—the *Arctic Stream,* her name. Greegan had effected an exchange, so much coal for so much rare timber. The *Arctic Stream,* a dainty, yacht-like barque of perhaps eight hundred tons, was newly arrived from North American ports. Chamberlain and I boarded her: she shone from shark-tail at her boom-end to taffrail with cleanliness. No sullying dirt defaced her shining decks: her crew—working leisurely—were dressed in newly washed dungaree and drill. Her mate—a fatherly old man, with ginger side-whiskers, who only needed a white apron to imitate a provincial grocer—was concerned lest we, in our dirt, should make a mess on his ivory-white planking, until, finding us to be well-spoken youths enough, he asked what house-flag the *Ravenby* flew. We told him.

"Oh, God help you!" he said; "I might have known. Come below and have a decent meal." And we did, with newspapers laid on the settee cushion covers to preserve their spotlessness.

Then—we'd timed our arrival for the noon-day meal-hour—when we'd eaten to repletion of well-cooked food, daintily served—the skipper was ashore, but the mate made a good

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substitute, and the steward might have been a nobleman's butler what of the attention he paid us—there came the question of getting our boatload of coal on board. The mate summoned the boatswain, who wore a white shirt and a watch-chain.

"Get the coal aboard from the *Ravenby's* boat, please." We'd not heard a "please" for months! "And, I don't want the men to get dirty—let four of them handle each sack, please. Oh, and spread some old sails on the deck before they begin." We'd carried those coal sacks on our own backs from fore-peak to gangway and down the gangway to the boat! We went back aboard the *Ravenby* and squirmed inwardly as we saw her filthy untidiness.

* * * * * * * * *

Scupper-deep with nitrates, we were ready to sail for home, around Cape Horn, in the month of August. That sounds nothing; to the experienced it means much. A huge German four-masted ship—one of the "P" clippers, then famous for their passages from Chile to Hamburg—completed her lading the night before we did. There was a West Coast custom of those days which may still survive: on the night before a sailing ship left her port for home she celebrated the event by a sing-song aboard, and then cheered every ship in the harbour; each ship responding with three times three, by way of wishing the homeward-bounder a pleasant voyage. There were always fireworks, and a tot of grog was served out. The German ship, whose name I have forgotten, went through the usual program. Five minutes after completion she was ablaze—a spark from a firework had dropped down a ventilator. Every ship in harbour got its boats away at a record speed; but by the time the first reached the vicinity the German was incandescent, and her crew were swimming for dear life in the vividly-illuminated water. We heard the sea seethe as it touched her glowing sides, clouds of steam arose on the night air. Her yards buckled, the newly-bent sails broke loose from their gaskets, dropped, were licked up by

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the flames; the yards fell, the masts followed. By daylight she was a hollow shell. Fortunately we were saved this fate, and we got away from Iquique in good order, with each ship sending a party aboard to help us get our anchors, as we'd helped other ships in our turn. A tug gave us a decent offing, we set sail, picked up a fair breeze, and commenced our run to Cape Horn.

Cape Horn, after delays, was merely a magnified repetition of the Easting. One might extol the magnificence of the continuous hard weather experienced there, but it would only create a surfeit of unpleasantness.

It was colder off the Horn than down the Easting, because we ran down to 61° South in search of a fair wind; and the rigging was caked with ice, that had to be broken away before we could get aloft to handle the canvas. Ice, indeed, grew everywhere; the boats were ugly hummocks; the decks were littered, and no stoves were permitted in the crew's quarters. For a matter of three weeks we ratched to the south, tacked or wore, and ratched to the north, faced by a hard easterly gale that showed no signs of breaking. Shortened-down we rioted in the furious seas. We were always wet, always hungry, always overworked; and yet—we thrived on it! In all fairness, let me say we thrived on it. Salt water leaked into our fresh water tanks; we ran short of tobacco; were put on short commons of salt meat and biscuit because the passage threatened to be prolonged. We sighted Cape Horn itself as we sighted the Antarctic ice. We saw a noble German five-master, laden to her scuppers, with topgallant sails set, raging westward as we laboured under a goose-winged maintopsail; we saw many things, but principally the white-crested roll of the Cape Horn combers and the hard, relentless sky overhead, with an albatross poised, seemingly motionless, about our mizzen truck. There were other albatrosses, and we used to catch them, preserving their skins for gifts for the girls at home, using their wing-bones for pipe-stems—although we'd no tobacco beyond the half-inches of cigars which Captain Greegan cut up and doled out to us—one half-inch per

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man per day. Hard-lying this, with a vengeance. Our clothes wore out, and there were no replacements. I'd sold my sea-boots; and rounded the Horn barefooted that first time—and I wasn't the only one to do that. To go out on deck was to be swept almost helplessly along the filled decks; to stand a trick at the wheel or on the look-out was a purgatory. For days on end it was impossible to secure any cooked meals—because the galley was washed out and untenable; and then we were served with tins of Australian boiled mutton—surely the most loathsome edible ever devised!—and, no coffee being obtainable, washed the unappetizing stuff down with brackish water laced with limejuice.

I met a much-decorated naval officer the other day who told me that his one dislike to the Navy was the occasional necessity for going to sea on practice cruises. He hated the thought of being absent from his home for a week-end. Of course, we stick-and-string men sneered at the Navy whilst we envied it. We said that a service that signalized a Saturday night at sea by a special toast didn't know anything at all about deep-water. I wonder what the mathematical, technical expert who sails under the White Ensign to-day would make of a three weeks' head-wind off the pitch of the Horn in the Southern winter!

Still, all things come to an end. The *Ravenby* ought to have ended at the bottom of the South Pacific; but instead she picked up a favourable slant that sent her roaring past the Falklands, and up, like a startled horse, into fine weather again, where our salt-sores healed and the genial sun baked the rawness from our bones. In fine weather it is easy to forget the bad times. Rhys forgot to mention the twenty-four-trick he stood at the wheel, when any attempt to relieve him menaced the ship with immediate destruction. The weaklings amongst the crew unloaded their pockets of the heavy scrap iron they'd filled them with; the contents of sea-chests were taken out and hung aloft to air.

We ramped up to the Doldrums, and hung and fretted there, the laden heavens spilling their contents upon us—

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and oh, we welcomed that genial, balmy rain, for it not only permitted us to wash our clothes and our persons, but it gave us sufficient drinking water and a relief from that exasperating brackishness. We decided the ship wasn't a bad old packet.

We idled through the lazy latitudes, becalmed for weeks at a stretch; we picked up weak Trades that freshened and died, and left us becalmed again. All the time we youngsters were learning as much as we could of our trade: chiefly how to use chipping-hammer and paint brush—and the days slid by imperceptibly, until four good months were past, and the high blue Western water was in sight. Thinking of the nearing home-going, we began to pay attention to our personal appearance. Our hands were in shocking case; but wise men advised poultices made of hammered biscuits, and we religiously slept in these awesome things until the deepest of the tar-stains were gone and our skins were of a maidenly whiteness. Then, when we were all ready for our family drawing-rooms, Mr. Perkins ordered us to tar down the rigging by hand, and, there being no appeal, this we did, and destroyed the good work completely. Beyond this, the only outstanding feature of that homeward passage was a hell-for-leather fight between the mate and Chamberlain on account of an Australian girl. It was a proper fight—hammer and tongs, with no rounds and no time-keeping; and Chamberlain licked Mr. Perkins into a cocked hat, after which our sportsmanlike mate threatened to report him to the owners and rid him of the benefit of all his sea service.

We arrived in Hamburg; a Channel pilot taking us as far as the Texel, and made fast there in the sailing ship harbour—Voyage One being thus completed; and we boys were instructed to proceed to our homes, if our parents had forwarded us the wherewithal to pay our fares. The crew were paid off the day following our arrival—and be sure the shore-sharks thronged aboard as soon as we entered harbour. Rhys had a miniature fortune to draw, and bragged about what he would do with it. What he actually did was to spend

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it on some sorrowful sister or other, so that, even before we boys left for home, he was asking for the loan of half a crown to tide him over until he signed on aboard an outward-bounder! And we boys left Hamburg two days after the *Ravenby* arrived!

Home was good after stormy voyaging; the tenth part of which has not been written here.

"You left home a boy; you've returned a man," was the paternal summing up of the situation. They were, in truth, halcyon days: a proper Christmas at home; and Chamberlain came along to share it with us; much rejoicing, an eternity of visiting. My excellent outfit was woefully depleted; all the lovingly prepared garments were either lost or in rags; indeed, I returned home such a derelict that the second question my father asked me was: "Has anyone who knows you seen you?" and on my answering in the negative, he bundled me into a cab and smuggled me home through the less frequented streets.

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CHAPTER XIII

SPELL HO!

My father's first question was: "Well, are you sick of it?" I'd have given my soul to answer: "Yes," but there was the matter of my pride. If my chums knew that I'd swallowed the anchor after one voyage what would they say?

"I think it's a splendid life," I lied; and if I hadn't done so I might even now have owned a lucrative practice in Harley Street!

It was during this spell of leave at home that my father mentioned the interest aroused by my letters; maybe it was this mention that first inoculated me with the writing virus. I do not know. So far as I was aware my letters home had been: "My dear father: we arrived here . . . after a pleasant voyage. We are going to . . . and expect to arrive about such and such a time. Please send me some money; your affectionate son——"

So enjoyably a couple of months sped by, and word came from the owners that, owing to a dock strike in Hamburg, it was necessary for the apprentices to return to the ship and unload cargo.

Prior to returning to Hamburg I renewed my outfit, in the light of practical experience. It was not nearly so imposing a show as the first, but it was eminently more practical. For—"I'd sent my little cupids all ashore"—I was salted, knew how to send down a royal yard in a gale of wind; could hand, reef and steer; had been round the Horn; was, indeed, an authority. I furnished myself with rubber sea-boots; cadged worn clothing from all male relatives, had flannel pillow-slips made to replace linen coverings; left the new uniform, with which I'd been equipped, at home in readiness for the next spell ashore; instructed my mother to buy coarse, cheap shirts

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and underwear; and, during the two or three days prior to my actual departure, paid farewell visits to all acquaintances who specialized in cooking; with the result that the box of home-made cakes and jams and delicacies that I took back with me eclipsed my sea-chest for magnitude.

Then I went back—with no illusions; nothing but a clammy certainty of what awaited me. The gilt was off the gingerbread, even as it was off my badge-cap; Romance was dead as the dodo. I'd something like two years and a half to endure of continued servitude ere I could legally claim my freedom. And yet—human nature being what it is—I was conscious of a certain leaping of pulses when I saw the *Ravenby's* tall masts—distinguishable amongst a forest of spars by reason of the double topgallant yards—loom out of the Elbe fog.

The Elbe itself was more or less icebound. It was bitterly cold, and there was much fog.

Chamberlain and Toby rejoined much about the time I did; Tottie—did I mention the fact?—had deserted; Jeffcott had brought influence to bear and had had his indentures cancelled. We set to work to rid the *Ravenby* of her cargo, which by this time had congealed into one solid mass. It was necessary to dig the petrified sacks of nitre out with pickaxes —warming work enough. Occasionally it was necessary to go aloft to repair the cargo-gear; this generally happened when it was blowing a blizzard. We were, however, granted the boon of a stove and coal to burn, and when we turned in at night, with a joyous "fugg" in the half-deck, and the stove-pipe red hot to the roof beams, we always kept a bucket of water handy to extinguish any unauthorized fire that might occur. We turned in sweating; we awoke to find icicles pendent from the deck beams overhead, and our blankets frozen stiff as boards.

I struck up a friendship with old Morgan, the watchman, who worked all day and kept watch all night; and listened to his reminiscences of bygone days when ships were ships, and seamen seamen. He was not an actual Paddy-Wester, but he had sailed shipmates with many of them. He had served as

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a seaman gunner aboard a battleship during the bombardment of Sevastopol; and his main regret in life was that he had fared worse in that engagement than had a shipmate—Joe Dougherty by name. For Joe Dougherty, also a seaman gunner, was sponging out a sixty-four pounder during the bombardment when Number One at the gun forgot to stop the vent, with the result that Joe lost his right hand and gained a pension of sixpence or eightpence a day. Furthermore, the gods seldom granting gifts singly, his incapacity so worked on the sentiments of a widow who kept a public-house near the gates of Portsmouth Dockyard, that she married him incontinent; and there was Joe settled for life, with nothing to do but smoke his pipe in his own snug, help himself to the stock-in-trade, and draw his sixpence or eightpence a day! The ultimate pinnacle of bliss, according to Morgan's standard.

He'd read one book, and only one, in all his eighty-odd years of life—it was Clark Russell's "Frozen Pirate"; and when I ventured to doubt the truth of that story of a man living frozen for a couple of centuries and then returning to life again, old Morgan, puffing solemnly at his nose-warmer over the galley-stove, would say sententiously: "I don't know everything, I'm not young enough for that. All I know is, I've used the sea, man and boy, for a matter of seventy year or so, and there ain't nothing I wouldn't believe." Poor old Morgan! I learnt much of tolerance, of sympathy with human weaknesses from him during those sittings over the galley-fire on blusterous, freezing nights, when the pack-ice was grinding noisily against the *Ravenby's* sides, and the leak from the tap of the fresh-water tank in the galley froze as it dropped. The cold didn't worry Morgan, who had spent weeks on an Arctic ice-floe in old whaling days ere he was rescued. He had used the sea, as he said, for seventy years or so—and that was a miracle in itself, for seamen are not usually a long-lived breed—and at the end of it this was all he had to compensate him: a precarious job as night-watchman, at a wage of ten shillings a week, with such food

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as he could procure. Neither chick nor child had he—he was a lonely soul; but he was thankful that it was no longer necessary for him to go out on deep water. He feared lest the going aloft would prove too much for one of his years; but—"To sign on board a ship, knowing you cannot pull your weight on halyard or brace, is treachery," was his dictum; "it robs your shipmates, it robs the owners—it might cost the life of a good fabric." That was his simple creed, and it wasn't a bad one. I fancy that if Morgan were alive to-day he would be one of the first to refuse the dole. He was too proud to live on charity; offered havenage in a home for decrepit seamen, he protested he was able to earn his livelihood, and there were others, crippled men, who needed the shelter more than he. He was salt of the sea, as was Rhys, the unconquerable; the hopeless wastrel, according to Puritanical opinion; the lean, wiry man who saved the *Ravenby* from destruction lone-handed. Steam and oil are killing that breed, I fear; although, during the war, I came across one or two who might have been cast in a similar mould.

The entire harbour was a mass of ice, except where one narrow lane had been ploughed by the ice-breaker for the ferry's use. Chamberlain and I got ashore and proceeded to enjoy ourselves. We hadn't much money and Captain Greegan had made no suggestion of a douceur; but we contrived to enjoy ourselves. We feasted and danced and skated; listening to much singing in bier halles, where one might sit for hours over a five-pfennig stein of lager, and no questions asked; we frolicked as youngsters will frolic, and forgot the flight of time. When our money was all spent but for the meagre ferry-fare, we started for the harbour. The ferry boat was there and the skipper was uncertain; but we tempted him to try to get us aboard. He tried gamely: backing into open water, charging ahead at full speed, crushing the ice aside; whilst Joe and I hugged a steam-pipe on deck—there was no cabin. It was terribly cold. We endured that for an hour, then the skipper said it was impossible. The temperature was ten below zero, at least. We might get out on to the

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ice and chance tramping over the floes to the *Ravenby*, or we might return to the ferry pier. We had no money. We were hungry. The skipper, who spoke some English, warned us that a current might reasonably have caused an impassable pool in the middle of the sailing-ship harbour.

"We'll go back ashore," determined Chamberlain. And, once ashore, he marched to the best hotel on the water-front —and oh, the joy of that vast porcelain stove in the hall!— ordered rooms, a succulent dinner, hotwater bottles and hot rum. We feasted royally, and afterwards turned in under those German feather quilts which fit themselves to a man's every angle; and, mellowed by the rum and the food, slept the sleep of the just. In the morning we breakfasted, as opulently as we had supped.

"Send the bill to Captain Greegan of the *Ravenby!*" Chamberlain directed afterwards, and the hotel proprietor, probably stunned by our effrontery, permitted us to depart. And, what's more, Captain Greegan paid the bill—and never allowed us to forget it. We received a terrific wigging when we returned aboard; and I think the mate received instructions to work us up a bit harder for he tried to drive us, until Chamberlain protested and threatened to put a head on him—he was only temporary mate, anyhow—after which things grew more bearable and continued so, until the rest of the boys joined up.

There were three new fellows: a *Conway* boy and two novices, in addition to Chicken and Crowther, who had escaped the early return. Chamberlain and Toby were to act as boatswain, one for each watch, and were granted the privilege of the boatswain's cabin for'ard. A blessed haven that cabin proved to be on many a nasty night afterwards; for one might sneak in there without being overlooked by the poop and there was always a cheerful welcome—and a man standing by to give the alarm if an officer grew too inquisitive about our whereabouts!

Mr. Perkins turned up, sinister as ever, before sailing-day, and with him the new second mate, whom we did not like.

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He had been a steam-boat quartermaster, and was a Liverpool tough. He had modelled himself on the real bucko-mate of fiction; he threw a bucket at unfortunate Ginger within an hour of joining; and hit me with a belaying pin when I remonstrated. The prospects looked anything but pleasant! Mr. Perkins had developed an added sourness; he'd expected to secure a command during the shore-spell, and had been disappointed. He sneered at the arrangement that made Chamberlain and Toby boatswains; he informed me that, as senior apprentice, I should be in his watch, and that I'd better look out for myself, since he'd heard that I'd been to see the owners, spinning spiteful yarns against him, which was a lie.

Captain Greegan had decided to take his wife and daughter on the voyage with him. Mrs. Greegan was a good-natured soul enough, though troubled with an inflated notion of her husband's importance; and had her visiting cards printed: "Mrs. Captain Greegan." She complained that we of the half-deck called her daughter "Kathleen," without the formal prefix; thought we ought to call her "Miss Kathleen." The child was about seven years old.

"Hold your whisht, woman!" Greegan said. "If those bhoys was back home ye'd be washing their semmets for them!" Kathleen—an ugly child, troubled by a somewhat nauseating snuffle—visited the half-deck at her own free will. So did the goat, carried aboard to supply the child with fresh milk, though not altogether of its own free will. We used to collar it in the middle watch, bear it by force of the strong arm to our quarters and there milk it dry, to our own great advantage, and Mrs. Greegan bemoaned the fact that the sea was drying up the poor animal's milk.

This second voyage was without particular interest—mere run out to Port Pirrie with coke, and an immediate reloading with manganese ore. Eleven months in all were occupied by the round-the-world trip, which had its usual ups and downs, including a hell-for-leather fight between myself

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and the second mate, with an Irish sailor standing by to see fair play.

Of course, taken in detail, the second voyage was an interesting affair enough. Outward, with a crew of pierhead jumpers—all foreign, needless to say—the second mate displayed his best form. A blow usually presaged a command from him; and he had the foredeck hands so cowed that he hardly need speak above a whisper to have men jump like startled girls. He tried on the same tactics with Chamberlain, and ultimately regretted it, for though he could "haze" an untutored man he knew nothing whatsoever about the niceties of the art of self-defence, and was like a newly-shorn lamb in Chamberlain's hands. Afterwards, the second mate vented his spite on me, until that excellent night when he strayed from the poop and carried his vindictiveness forward of the main hatch. Chamberlain served as acting-second-mate during his ensuing spell in dry-dock. We of the windjammer crowd fought bitterly—without rounds as without mercy. The details I hardly remember to-day, except that I had been accused of funking on a bleak Pacific night. But I helped to carry the second mate to his berth—I do remember that, and Captain Greegan breathed threats of logging me. However, he didn't do it, because, I think, he had had a row with the second mate a day or two before the encounter. The root of that trouble was the second mate's protest because the pickles were removed from the cabin table when he went down to supper!

Down the Easting, and around bleak Cape Horn we fared a second time and, off the Horn, encountering the usual bad weather, the ship being laden with a solid and inelastic cargo, we had to resort to many devices to prevent her from rolling the masts out of herself. The heavy ore cargo was built up in the ship's middle-part in a cage of timber, and not a single bag of it shifted so far as I am aware; but the ship's ensuing rolling cannot be described in words. Her standing rigging slacked; we took up all the slack of the screws—without

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avail. We bowsed the shrouds from side to side; we performed queer readjustments of cargo, but still the fabric rolled; and I know from the evidence of his own mouth that Captain Greegan was mortally afraid lest she should not only roll the sticks out of herself but also roll clean over and capsize. This frantic rolling naturally loosened her plates and two hours of every watch were devoted to pumping out the wells; at one time we had a clean ten feet water in the holds. But we got home to Antwerp somehow with a patch on a patch and a patch over all—aged tremendously by our experience, and proudly conscious that we had acquired still more sea-time in readiness for the ordeal of the second mate's examination. As usual we brought home an entirely different crew from the one we started the voyage with—every man had run from the ship as soon as she reached Port Pirrie. We had spent our Christmas Day in the Bay of Biscay, in the heart of a yelling gale; we had lost two men overboard; Mr. Perkins was more unpleasant than ever, Mrs. Greegan, a devout Catholic, had spent much time on her knees—that's a curt résumé of my second voyage, full enough of quaint experiences, of humorous incidents and breathless adventure to make a book in itself.

We paid off in Antwerp and went home. Later, we were ordered to rejoin, the ship then lying in the Royal Albert Dock, London; having been towed across from Antwerp to load a general cargo for Sydney, N.S.W. Chamberlain was studying for his second mate's examination at a London college, where tutors endeavoured to make up in three weeks for the lack of navigation and seamanship of four bitter years. I maintained a regular correspondence with him, and he met me at Euston when I returned from the spell ashore. By this time, the gilt being off the gingerbread, the ship loomed as invitingly as a penal settlement.

"I've been down aboard the *Ravenby,*" Chamberlain said. "She won't be ready for sea for another week; so why hurry? My landlady has a spare room!" I had some pocket-money on this occasion; and so, during the next five days, we gave

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ourselves rather a riotous time. Each morning, however, I used to proceed to the Royal Albert Docks, and there, screened by convenient railway trucks, watch the progress of the *Ravenby's* loading. Occasionally I would invite a dock labourer to the near-by public house and buy him drink, in order to get the latest news. The others of the half-deck crowd were already aboard, and working their hardest; the ship was billed to sail within a day or two. There being nothing else to do—and Chamberlain and myself had dined at the best restaurants and taken boxes at the best West End shows: I remember we saw *The Geisha* one evening, with Letty Lind, Marie Tempest, Hayden Coffin and Rutland Barrington in the cast, to say nothing of minor stars who since have won fame—I decided that the time had arrived to report myself, with the cheque that represented my father's contribution to past expenses. As I crossed the gangway, a porter in attendance carrying my sea-chest, an elderly individual in rolled-up shirt-sleeves, with ginger-coloured side-whiskers, descended the poop-ladder. He was carrying a bucket of dirty hot water, which, from its scum of loose rope-yarns and match sticks showed that it had been used to wash out a cabin.

"Mate aboard?" I asked nonchalantly. Chamberlain had got wind of a job in the city, where a man might earn as much as twenty-three shillings a week, and I believed I could secure it; consequently I felt independent.

"Are you the runaway apprentice?" asked the ginger-whiskered man. "We've set the police on your track."

"Mind your own business, steward!" said I, still indifferent.

"I am the mate," he answered.

"Then why don't you look like one?" I countered, descending to the deck.

I admit that I was elevated; though not with liquor. I was chiefly delighted that the *Ravenby* was ridded of her perpetual Jonah, Mr. Perkins, until the thought struck me—Can he be in command? There was that possibility. Then I

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saw too-familiar feminine underwear—grey flannel for the most part—hanging from chest-lashings in the mizzen rigging.

"I'd like you to know that I'm Mr. Gadsby," said the ginger-whiskered one; "and I was *Captain* Gadsby before ever you smelt salt water. If I hadn't gone partners with a man in a rigging-loft——" There and then he told me the whole story, often repeated, of his venture in a comfortable shore job. He told it with a bucket of water in one hand and occasionally he used that hand for gesturing, with disastrous results to his trousers and shoes. I think I can see him yet as he stood there, gesticulating—but I can see Mr. Gadsby still more plainly as he showed at sea: a courageous and skilful man, something of a psalm-singer, pacing the poop with a copy of Holy Writ in his hands, mouthing Biblical sentences or singing in an unmusical voice from Moody and Sankey's hymnal casting the Book aside to leap like a tiger to the main deck, with a mouth full of blasphemy, to trim the yards and blame the crew for their hesitancy; and then, the work accomplished, to return to the poop, pick up the Book, and resuming his steady pacing, bellowing—"Send out a lifeline" or "Lights along the shore," or some one or other of those inspiring Evangelical hymns.

Mr. Perkins had gone—and only the Lord of Great Waters knows whither. I was senior apprentice, and, so I was told, on interviewing the captain who was indignant because I was late in joining ship—not that the ship needed me so much as that the captain needed my father's cheque!—that responsibilities of an unusual kind had descended on my shoulders. It was quite possible, said Captain Greegan, that I might be required to serve as third mate—unpaid—and here I was setting a bad example to the juniors! A third mate had been ordered to join, but he had not turned up. However, news of him did arrive aboard the ship an hour or two later in the shape of a telegram, which said, with simple pathos:

"In trouble, Bow Street Police Court; please act."

Captain Greegan sent the agent's clerk to Bow Street,

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to pay such fines as were necessary, and before we sailed, in the raw dawn the new third mate joined ship, still in a state of collapse. He had been victimized, he explained later, by a gang of men and women who had offered to show him the more enticing sights of London, when they met him at a railway terminus. He had lots of money and was quite willing to see life with a capital "L," and—he awakened into semi-consciousness in a London gutter, penniless, sick and cold, with a policeman shaking him into sensibility. But he did not explain this until the *Ravenby* was fairly out of the London River and anchored in the Downs to await a fair wind down-Channel.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD TRAIL THAT'S ALWAYS NEW

THE ensuing voyage hardly differed from the preceding. We ran short of drinking water, on account of the captain's wife using too much to wash those grey flannel undergarments. We enticed the new goat into our half-deck in the middle watch, and milked it. We accepted surreptitious gifts of sweet biscuits, tinned tongues and other delicacies from the one saloon passenger—a dipsomaniac proceeding in a round-the-world voyage in order to rid himself of his besetting vice.

He was a skilled pianist, a man with a world-famed name. He had brought a piano with him and in his soberer moments played like a seraph. His custom was to appear on deck about two in the afternoon—Captain Greegan taking his usual deep-water caulk in his cabin below—and ask of such member of the crew as chanced to be at the helm his favourite tunes; and play—with his tormented soul crying its agonies through the cadences—play, I've often thought, the whole throbbing story of his unrealized dreams and his futile strugglings against his besetting curse. But he left the ship in Sydney, unable to stand further the petty tyranny of Captain Greegan, who plied him with raw liquor until he was three-parts insensible, and then accused him of insulting Mrs. Greegan: though I doubt if the greatest dipsomaniac alive would ever have conceived an amorous thought for that shapeless woman, whose mouth seldom opened save to voice some complaint against one member of the crew or other. Women, no doubt, have their places in the scheme of things, but the last place of all for them is aboard a deepwater windjammer!

However, the passenger handed over his piano as a free gift to Captain Greegan, together with some honest English gold—and that case of blackmail was settled. The piano was

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sold at a good price and no doubt everyone concerned, except that unfortunate dipsomaniac, was satisfied.

Sydney—a wonderful town even in those days—where the stevedores broached the liquid cargo in the most adroit manner I have ever seen—and got gloriously intoxicated and threw chunks of dunnage wood and cargo-hooks at their foremen when they protested—so far as we were concerned was merely a place where one could get full meals at threepence a head; or, if you wanted a thoroughgoing blow-out of six courses, at sixpence per head; and then you emptied the sugar basin into your handkerchief and pocketed the spoons and forks, by way of lagniappe. The working sailor sees little of the ports he visits; and sees nothing of any part of the country beyond those ports, for he is—or was—granted little leisure for sight-seeing; and with the customary Saturday halfcrown in his pocket, finds it a difficult matter to travel farther than the nearest house of refreshment. Windjammer sailormen judged their ports by the quality and price of the liquor obtainable at each calling-place. Publicity agents might shout themselves hoarse in advertising certain districts, but Merchant Jack would settle the whole matter in a nutshell over his forecastle table: "Rotten beer they sell at So-and-so," he would say; and that ended it.

Some day I should like to visit those ports of my early voyaging and see what they are really like.

During this voyage we found what a difference it was to have Mr. Gadsby as mate instead of the evaporated Mr. Perkins. Gadsby had served an apprenticeship, exactly as we had, and his sympathies were with the half-deck throughout; so that we were given every opportunity to learn our trade. He fought valiantly with the skipper—Greegan being all against the half-deck gang—as a plucky White Leghorn rooster will battle with a ponderous Rhode Island Red. He possessed a quality that was more potent than torrents of blasphemous words or threats of blows; and little by little he converted Greegan to his own way of thinking. Notwithstanding his sanctimoniousness and his similarity to a petty

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tradesman—he needed only an apron to complete the illusion even when we were rioting in bad weather—he was a well-versed sailorman. Of course, the outward crew deserted at Sydney—the third mate with them, Greegan saw to that. The second mate—a quiet little man who had replaced the previous bucko officer—remained aboard; though suffering intensely. For the mentality of more than one ship-skipper was such that if he showed favouritism to the mate, he must show hatred to the second mate; or vice versa; and as Gadsby had worked his way into favour, the poor little second mate was very much the ship's black sheep. However, he stayed behind—there was a girl in the case, and he couldn't afford to risk dirtying his ticket.

Prior to our leaving Sydney, for Newcastle, to load coal for the cordially-hated West Coast, our recent ex-passenger sent down an invitation to us of the ship's half-deck to attend at Sydney Town Hall, where he was giving an organ recital on the wonderful organ—then the finest in the whole world—which had been carried out by the *Ravenby*. We went, to a glorious entertainment; as glorious as the supper he afterwards offered; and at that supper, being partially sober, he gave us his free and unbiased opinion of the *Ravenby* and her commander and all that belonged to her commander; a feat of rhetoric that delighted our pagan souls.

Sydney Harbour was unquestionably very beautiful. To my mind it greatly surpasses its rival, Rio de Janeiro. It presents a gay scene on a Sunday morning, when half Sydney goes afloat, in cat-boats, ferry steamers or Canadian canoes; but during our stay there a bluejacket, attempting to swim ashore from his ship, was caught by a shark and eaten almost before his death-cry sounded. And, also, at the swimming baths, a shark was discovered in the salt-water pool itself—the bath being guarded from open water by a grating, through which the youngster had apparently passed. Its discovery was made after a swimmer had lost a foot by being grabbed in what was, ostensibly, a safe bathing-place.

The customary hospitality of the Australians was not lack-

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ing in Sydney. Mr. Gadsby had countless friends there, dating from the time when he commanded a ship of his own; and he took us ashore and introduced us to coveys of dainty Australian girls and encouraged them to give us a good time; for though an elderly man himself, he was able to remember his own boyhood. Remembering his own leaner years, he prevailed upon Captain Greegan to offer us extra comforts in the way of food and such rare delicacies as tinned milk; which were purchased for us and paid for by our parents. I have a recollection of being called aft by Mr. Gadsby—the captain, his wife and his distressing daughter being ashore—to aid him in restowing cabin stores.

"There's a whole cask of cabin bread there, Shaw," he said. "D'you think there's any place in the half-deck where you could put it?" There was a place and he himself helped me to carry the loot to its hiding-place, and the second mate broke up the cask and pitched the staves overboard!

One of the runners shipped for the short tow to Newcastle claimed to have been in Sydney at the time the *Dunbar* went ashore on the North Head after a record-breaking passage out from home. In fact, I think he'd actually come to believe that he was the sole survivor of that tragedy of the sea. He told us how the *Dunbar's* captain had made the boast: "Hell or Sydney in sixty days!" and how, on the fifty-ninth day out they'd sighted the high bluffs that guard Sydney Harbour from the might of the Pacific's weather; he told us how, afraid to attempt the harbour with the wind then blowing, the captain had stood off until the following morning; but that, changing his mind, he had run for port in the dead of night, piling up the fabric with her rare cargo of humanity in ruin on the implacable cliffs. Then, having fascinated us with the tale, he naturally asked if we happened to have an unconsidered drop of the right stuff stowed away in a bottle anywhere!

When we left Newcastle, this same romancer was one of the crew. He'd been shanghaied, of course—lacking two months' advance of pay, equipped with a sea-going kit which

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he displayed for our edification when he was sober enough to do so. There were seven biscuit-sacks; a lady's hair-comb and a pair of much-worn corsets in his bag—nothing more!

All too soon we were up and away again, bound for Iquique; with the usual new crew, sore-headed and sour, but—as we proved in later days—sterling men. Most of them were premium apprentices who had deserted their ships on account of some barmaid or other; and stout fellows they were. There being no Mr. Perkins to put the fear of death in them, and no bucko second mate, they behaved well and, beyond lowering a life-boat and selling it for liquor in Iquique, gave no grounds for complaint.

As the third mate had vanished, his duties fell upon me; and, instead of being permitted to sneak away in the middle watch for a caulk on the half-deck chests, I was required to pace the poop with Mr. Gadsby, who told me all about his rigging-loft, his latest sweetheart and his hopes for the future, as well as of his disappointments in the past. But he also gave me some sound tuition in seamanship; taught me to handle a ship by night; and generally played nautical godfather to me. Also, he endeavoured to convert me to his particular creed—a fire-and-brimstone creed it was, as I remember.

For a period of three months we lay in Iquique, unloading coal and loading nitrates, the watches being allowed shore-leave on alternate Sundays and the ship generally becoming more humanized. Then, scupperdeep once more, we weighed for Hamburg, endured the vicissitudes of the Southern Pacific, rounded the Horn, beat up against the Falklands, lost a spar or two and a sail or two in a Pampeiro off the mouth of the River Plate; and so, crossing the Line, picked up a vigorous north-east trade in Fifteen North, which developed later into the most astounding storm that I have ever witnessed, I think.

So taken by surprise were we that there was not even time to bend hard-weather sails, and much of the burlap fine weather canvas was blown clean out of the ropes.

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When we entered the Bay of Biscay we still carried fine weather topgallant sails. The gale increased immeasurably; we ran before it. The seas piled high astern, and only a press of canvas could keep us ahead of the riotous combers; and the canvas was for the most part worn and full of holes, but therein lay our safeguard, for the wind went through the tattered stuff instead of blowing it clean away, and we remained on the surface of the sea.

We were more fortunate than other craft. At break of a lurid day we saw one ship run clean under, and we were unable to offer any help; we ourselves were in sorry plight. The seas had made a clean breach of us; our life-boats were washed away, and we were counting the moments until our final plunge came. We saw a line of battleship's funnels swept clean away by the devastating seas—the *Anson* she was; and when we ultimately crawled into Falmouth Harbour under jury-rig—we'd lost a mast or two—we found that port so crowded with distressed shipping that we could hardly discover a corner wherein to lie to lick our sores.

But we got her home somehow, in the way that ill-found ships do get home; and, the ship being paid off in Hamburg, I found myself confronted with a problem. I was naturally ambitious to climb the ladder of success. My indentures were not due to expire for a clear two months after the *Ravenby* left port on her next voyage; and the rumor had it that when next she sailed it would be for one of those Come-day, go-day, God-send-Sunday voyages, lasting three or four years. That meant, that as soon as my articles expired, I should be required to sign-on as able-seaman at the rate of wages then current in Hamburg for deep-water windjammers—two pounds five a month. As able-seaman I should be required to serve during the long months of the promised voyage. There would be no chance of sitting for the necessary examinations —and I'd seen myself as master-mariner by the time I was twenty-three!

I put the matter to my father, who saw eye to eye with me. We interviewed the owners—where my father said every-

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thing that I would have wished to say in honest English, and made even the ex-slave-trader wince and lift his hands in token of surrender; and we left the office carrying my cancelled articles, together with a reference from the owners stating that I had acquitted myself to their perfect satisfaction during the period of my servitude. I was free of the *Ravenby* at last! I had three years and nine months' deep-water service completed; I lacked another three months—but, three months was nothing! I signed on as able-seaman aboard a Mediterranean-bound steamer at four pounds ten a month; happened to be promoted to boatswain at the first port of call, which was Alexandria, and so put in the requisite sea service handsomely, living in a boat that, by comparison with the *Ravenby,* was luxurious opulence: eating better grub by far than the windjammer's cabin had ever provided; enjoying more leisure; granted freedom of action; liberty to go ashore every evening and every Sunday when the steamer was in port; never in dread of inopportune calls for an all-hands' job—when bad weather came we hove-to by the engine-room telegraph! Seafaring under those conditions wasn't going to sea at all. Then, too, the ports we visited; the enchantment of real travel that resulted. Windjammers meant four-month spells without so much as sighting land; steamboating meant flitting from port to curious port, each with its own individual interest. The deckhands of this tramp steamer numbered four. They weren't so much sailors as painters and helmsmen; and steering the *Glenorchy* even in a gale was work a seven-year-old child could perform, for she had steam steering-gear in a nattily enclosed wheel-house. By virtue of a windjammer training I was contemptuous of such excellent conditions, and I must have bored both officers and men to distraction by my insistent trick of "sending royal yards down in a gale of wind," by way of contrast to the new conditions. But they recognized my youth, I suppose, and were very patient, and seldom mentioned that they, too, were sailing-ship trained, though so long ago that they'd almost forgotten the fact.

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The ports we visited! Suda Bay, in Crete, was one; Algiers, Tangier, Gibraltar—where I discovered that many awe-inspiring objects of my eleven-year-old boyhood were not so colossal as I'd always imagined! Oran, Bizerta, Malta, Alexandria, all the ports of Sicily; the Spanish fruit ports—Barcelona alone was worth a four years' apprenticeship to see, with its clamorous Ramblah; the record of those early steamboating days is like a gazeteer. We were sent to quarantine at the Island of Delos, in the Grecian Archipelago. Bubonic plague was rife in Alexandria at the time we were there; people were dying like flies everywhere; even the bumboat men and dragomans—coal-black natives, who spoke broad Scotch and rejoiced in such quaintly foreign names as "Jock Macpherson," the owner of which name was brother to Tam Mactavish—were not immune.

I suppose it must have been the unaccustomedness of possessing leisure and money—for aboard the *Glenorchy* we were permitted to draw pocket-money to the limit of the pay owing to us—that prompted me to lay in a store of oranges. They were very cheap and they were very luscious; I filled the lower bunk of my berth with them for a couple of shillings. I ate oranges whenever a moment could be snatched, and developed dysentery. The skipper prescribed—port wine and brandy in equal proportions. But when the port medical officer visited us to give us our clearance I was *hors de combat* in my bunk—feeling under my armpits whenever I was awake for sign of the tell-tale swellings that should denote the plague. I had a temperature—half an hour before the M.O. visited me I had been struggling with a wild cat that had somehow made its way aboard, and that, from the shelf above my bunk where it had crouched, had leaped tigerishly at my face. The fit went out—I was under suspicion. I opened my heart to the captain, and assured him that oranges, and oranges alone, were to blame, coupled with the force of an Egyptian sun; but the port M.O. refused to be influenced. I fancy he must have felt that he had to earn his stipend somehow. We were not given a clean bill of health, and conse-

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quently were ordered to Delos. We lay there in a picturesque bay, staring for hours at a time at ruined temples that glinted in the radiant Mediterranean sun. I was better and about my business before our anchor crashed to the bottom but you may not argue against the petty tyranny of port officials, who, I think, must be paid a commission on results. In quarantine we were required to remain, having no intercourse whatsoever with the shore, save clandestinely. If we wished to send a letter, for instance, we had to place it in the cleft of a long bamboo cane and pass it overside to a boat that rowed in towards the ship as if competing for championship honours, where it was received by an official who handled it gingerly, ordered his crew to back out at all speed, and then slit the envelope across and across in plain sight of the ship's company, prior to its being fumigated and despatched to its destination; and the queer part of the whole mad business was that the ship was as clear of the plague or any other infection as a ship well could be!

We had to fly the yellow flag at our foremast for a tedious fortnight none the less. There being nothing else to do after six o'clock, we went swimming. So salt are those waters that you may swim for hours on end without tiring; so clear that we could plainly see the anchor and the curious fish swimming about it on the bottom, although the lead showed us that we lay in seventeen fathoms.

The engine-room staff decided that the time was opportune to effect certain repairs down below; and whilst removing the cross-head cover of the high-pressure cylinder the chunk of metal fell from its slings and fractured the second engineer's ankle. He was considerably worried about the matter, bemoaning his bad luck. His wife was in an interesting condition when the *Glenorchy* left Glasgow, and he had applied for permission to remain ashore for a voyage to see her through her travail; but the owners had not seen fit to grant that permission. The setting of the broken ankle was a problem. The local doctor had no intention of boarding

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us to attend to the injury, for we were plague-stricken and under a ban.

To land the injured engineer was forbidden, so we compromised. As gently as might be, the hurt man was lowered into a boat, which was pulled to within hailing distance of the shore. The Greek doctor had not a word of English, but could speak a sort of French—the ultra-English brand. The Greek doctor shouted instructions from ashore in his French, which I translated into English, which the captain—also in the boat—translated into Clydeside English and, acting under these enfiltered instructions, set the injured limb—and the marvel to me is how he did it! Of course, being merely a tramp steamer, we carried no surgeon. We had a medicine-chest, containing splints and bandages, containing drugs carefully numbered, so that if you ran out of No. 12 you could easily mix up Nos. 7 and 5; but beyond that we had nothing except an excellent fund of common sense, that enabled us to cope with emergencies, precisely as, aboard the *Ravenby*—I forgot to mention it before—we had amputated a seaman's gangrenous leg without either anæsthetics or proper surgical instruments.

Relieved from the shadow of the yellow flag—and I've simmered under it in many parts of the world—we proceeded to Dehlia to load a cargo of ore. Dehlia, at first glimpse, offered no attractions. There was nothing to see but a sheer cliff of red rock rising perpendicularly out of a dazzling blue sea. Two large iron rings were secured to the cliff's base—to these we tied the ship. Out of the centre of the rocky face a chute swung down, and a torrent of iron ore descended. This went on for an indefinite period. The ore was delved further inland, and borne to the chute—which was the actual port of Dehlia—on mule-back, so that sometimes we got a couple of baskets full of ore, sometimes a dozen, sometimes, for hours at a stretch, none at all. Occasionally we shifted ship, to bring another hatch under the aim of that impersonal chute. We never saw a human being; never heard a cry. The ore came tumbling just as the folks ashore dictated—they seemed to

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take it for granted that a ship was lying beneath; and I suppose they went on dumping ore regularly, or as regularly as a Greek can do anything, day in day out, trusting to their special gods that something might be underneath to receive it!

Sunday came, and our pilot, who spoke about as much English as a Paraguayan speaks Chinese, said that on that day no ore would be decanted. Holiday was suggested: there was nothing to do, nowhere to go. But I—curious to see foreign places—asked laboured questions. There was, it seemed, a precarious path to the summit of the impersonal rock. There might be something beyond—the pilot was vague. Certainly the ore came from somewhere. certainly human beings dug it and conveyed it; but as to what the interior of the island might be he had no idea. He was so parochial that he had no interest. With all the Grecian Archipelago as his happy hunting-ground he seldom set foot ashore save in his own two-by-four village. However, the itch of adventure irritated me, on the fair Sabbath, after washing the ship down. I donned shore-going raiment, and, alone—for the boatswain of a ship may not companion with the crew, in case he loses his dignity, nor with the officers lest they lose theirs—I went ashore. I might have invited the donkeyman; but I didn't, because of his habit of getting thoroughly drunk as soon as ever he sighted a wine-shop.

Up the tortuous path, then, I made my way; without money, but hungry for experiences. I felt a Columbus, for the pilot had explained that no member of any crew had ever been known to visit the shore. It was hot, and it grew hotter; I was reminded of a day on the Chilian coast when a party of us set forth to climb Acapulca, that twenty-four-thousand-foot Andean hill. We didn't climb it because it was about a hundred miles from our landing-place; but we got hot.

At the summit of the cliff was a much-used track—a mule-path. Also, farther inland, there was a Greek peasant—a veritable brigand; petticoat and breeches, sashful of knives and much gold embroidery, complete. He rode on the after-part of a small mule, much as a London coster was wont to

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sit his "moke." I had nothing to lose—much to gain. I saluted him; he flashed perfect teeth. Had he flashed a knife instead I was helpless, but he smiled. I do not know how we bargained, but I found myself mounted on the mule, with the brigand racing behind. I tried to control the animal, but I discovered it better to leave it to its own devices. No wheeled vehicle, nothing but a mule, indeed, could have navigated that track. It was like the side of a house; there were gaps which fetched one's heart to his mouth, but the mule was sure-footed. After a while the path went in amongst olive-groves and vineyards of terraced loveliness. There were fragments of ancient statuary gleaming whitely here and there; above all was that perfect Mediterranean sky. But it was a lonely path, too, and I realized that it would be the simplest thing in life for my conductor to heave me over the cliff, or knife me and possess himself of all I had—the clothes I wore, and the pipe I smoked. Brigand or no, he proved a courteous guide, for he led me to a village where, I believe, few men of British blood had ever been. It was a feast day; our arrival created a sensation, for my bandit ran ahead with cries to announce my coming. For the nonce I was no longer the modest boatswain of the *Glenorchy;* I was a conqueror entering upon his triumph. A singing procession formed up to lead me to the square. Straight to the little church they piloted me, and there, bowing on the threshold of the sacred building, stood the bearded priest—the spiritual father of that little community—wearing his hat like an inverted topper, and a somewhat snuffy cassock. He explained to me—we spoke honest-to-God Latin for the most part!—the merit of his church and his flock; showed me around the pitiful little stucco building—though fragments of marble carved by forgotten artists of two thousand years ago were embedded in the plaster walls; dilated on the merits of the tawdry but earnest paintings with all the naïve pride of a bishop displaying his historical cathedral; laid out his shining vestments for my appreciation; climbed with me to the summit of the tower that I might obtain a full view—and the glories of that view I

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shall never do justice to, try as I might; took me to his stark dwelling, where a young and very beautiful olive-skinned girl served as housekeeper, and there regaled me with sticky, spiced cakes and wine, as spiced and sticky, before handing me over to the throng, who were dancing and singing like the chorus of a musical comedy all the time, and who looked very like such a chorus, indeed, for all the men wore the white petticoat breeches and the gold-embroidered Zouave jackets, and all the women—any one of whom might have served as model for Phidias—attired in eye-aching but extremely well-blended colours. It was a beautiful picture. The local orchestra seated itself under the trees and enacted a concert; children danced and looked like a Wedgwood frieze, wreathing themselves with flowers and bays; mine host of the local eating-house dished up a sumptuous repast towards nightfall —the *pièce de résistance* being a ragout of goat, whose flavour lingers with me to this day; there was wine—heady or light, as I chose; and then, when feasting and pleasure-making were done, and the priest in his best cassock served as my principal host, when I put my hand stoutly into an empty pocket and asked the score, there were shakes of the head and the assurance that any suggestion of payment would be an insult. Which was just as well for me, as I couldn't have paid, save by pledging my garments. Later, under a serene moon, the majority of the islanders accompanied me back to the summit of the cliff and bade me farewell with real sincerity and, I believe, regret, though I couldn't understand a word they were talking about. As for my original bandit, the mule-owner who had opened for me the gates of a Sabbath Paradise, I persuaded him to accept a silk handkerchief I owned; and even then he insisted on my accepting the biggest and most formidable knife of his armoury, ornately-carved scabbard and all; and would have given me the lot at a whisper. I wonder what would have happened to a lonely Greek, who, penniless and lacking understanding, chanced to enter an average English village on a Sunday afternoon!

I told the second and third mates about my afternoon, and

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they decided to emulate me. But the novelty had worn off; they were but coldly received; they paid for their liquor at the wine-shop, and got so drunk that they insulted most of the young women and had to make a bolt for it. Of course, they'd gone ashore swaggering—they were British and they'd show these damned foreigners what a Briton could do. I've found a lot of that spirit amongst the worse-educated of British seafarers. Notoriously amongst that censorious race, the Scots—I mean the Scots who sail in ships' forecastles, and who are drawn from the swarming closes of the Broomielaw and the teeming tenements about the Tron Steeple of Glasgow.

For three or four months I roamed the Mediterranean. Much pleasure came my way as a result; but there also came a disillusionment—a dissatisfaction with my chosen trade. Its glamour had long since departed, of course; but there had remained behind a feeling that some time I should reach out and grasp that profession's plums. I began to learn that those plums were rare, and even the rarest not over-ripe. To be captain of an Atlantic flier seemed the summit of ambition; but any bank manager ashore, with one-tenth of the responsibility, could secure as large a stipend. I fancy it must have been really in those Mediterranean days that the itch to break away from a seafaring career first troubled me; when I began to search for possible employment that might advance me to success. But what was there to do? The only shore job for a sailor was at some trade connected with the sea, unless he did—what the *Glenorchy's* second mate did—become a traveller for whisky and his own best client!

Maybe it was that the romanticism of the Mediterranean was infecting me too. For there were nights, when the steamer, trudging across a floor that might have been black marble but for the broken phosporescent white of the wake and bow-waves; with a sky above like a purple pall, jewel-spangled, when a whispering breeze fetched scent of rare flowers to the nostrils above the clean tang of the crisp sea air, when ghostly islands stole shadowily into view, beckoning us with winking

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lights, speeding us past with other winking lights; when a silver disc climbed majestically from the dimmed horizon, to throw a dazzling track across the silent watery floors—there were nights of such a quality when the soul seemed drawn out of the body that housed it and wafted it away to remote, unreal pinnacles of fancy, to learn there a craving hunger to describe the glory of the world. And through such a mist of hungry dreams would come the strumming and tinkling of mandolines and guitars from unseen fishing feluccas; and some unrealized operatic tenor would of a sudden burst into rare song, which ringing across the hushed waters, sounded like a Kyrie eleison; a tribute to God above! I think the soul draws nearer to heaven's gates on a Mediterranean midnight than at any other time.

Often and often I'd take a middle watch trick at the wheel, permitting the helmsman to sleep in, simply for the double joy of watching the night itself and feeling that indefinable sensation of power and command that comes to a man who feels a throbbing mass beneath his hand, responsive to his slightest touch. It was as though oneself hurled the fabric crashing through the inky water, that burst into startled white at the ship's advance, raged into a frothing, snow-white wake, that stretched clean to the horizon astern, and then closed mysteriously down into its initial calm.

So, lost in inchoate, fragmentary dreams, that boiled for expression but found no outlet, that tore at the heart-strings to breed a disquietude that was more real than physical hunger, the hours went by; and usually, as the raptness attained its zenith, as one felt that he must climb to the masthead and there yell mighty sentences to the night, the second mate would pause in his monotonous pacing of the bridge, and "How'd a glass of Glasgae beer go down now, bosun?" he'd ask; and, driven by loneliness, I suppose, would proceed to discuss the charms of some light-o'-love whose beat was mostly in Sauchiehall Street and whose preference was for second mates when she couldn't get mates or captains! Down I would drop from Elysian heights with a thud; and the trick would

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end in a whirl of Rabelaisian stories, that had only the reeking filth of the gutter as their plots, and that were not even saved by the leaven of humour.

The fact of my position—neither officer nor man—contributed to loneliness; orgies ashore had no draw for me. I developed a habit of wandering—wandering; waiting on adventure; forsaking the beaten paths, blundering into queer entanglements. I saw a man stabbed to the heart in a Spanish gambling den in Valencia; he fell against me and his life-blood dyed my shoes. I was seized as I attempted to seize the killer; knives were flashed across my eyes; a plot was devised, I fancy, by which the onus of the killing was to be laid on me; but I bolted, fighting free, and heard no more of the matter, though the sight of every policeman fetched my heart to my throat until the ship cleared the port. I wandered through cañon-like streets, odorous with flowers and other matters less pleasurably scented; listening to distant guitars strumming erotically; catching seductive glances from bright eyes behind those jealous Spanish window-shutters; caught flowers tossed from balconies to the accompaniment of musical laughter—and I think the laugh of a Spanish señorita as musical a sound as earth creates!—I struck up a friendship with a police-sergeant in Barcelona who showed me the sights that are not shown to tourists, and who introduced me to his family, where I was always a welcome guest to their stews and wines and where I got an insight into Spanish customs and habits that has served me in good stead since; though I was slow in picking up a working knowledge of the language, which is one of the most useful any man can acquire.

I helped in a raid on a revolutionary club in Barcelona, which was and is, I believe, a hotbed of unrest. I saw the streaks of dried refuse still adhering to that glorious statue of Columbus which ornaments the picturesque city—the refuse which the simple-hearted Spaniards had thrown at America's discoverer when America and Spain went to war! Columbus had found America; if he hadn't there could have been no war—there you were—down with Columbus!

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CHAPTER XV

ONE OF THE AFTERGUARD

But Mediterranean voyaging came to a close too swiftly; and I came home under the shadow of the impending second mate's examination. I had picked up only a raw smattering of my trade—as a sailor, not as an officer—and so I had to go back to school and start all over again. In every port are nautical academies where seafaring youth is polished and pruned—for a fee, remarkably moderate in those days. The instructors understand precisely what's required of a candidate; they understand the idiosyncrasies of Board of Trade examiners; and set their pupils on guard.

Being naturally anxious to get the business over, after a fortnight's swotting, I hoped I was ready for the ordeal. In the Board of Trade exam, divided into two parts—navigation, which is written, seamanship, which is *viva voce*—failure can be variously punished. Fail in navigation you may try again the following week, fail in seamanship, and you are sent back to sea to learn your job, for three or six months. I was scared of the seamanship exam, everyone said Captain——, who was a holy terror, would take me, but it had to be gone through. The navigation was comparatively simple: finding latitudes and longitudes, writing down certain of the Articles which deal with seafaring habits; showing a working knowledge of the compass and its baffling deviations.

"Go in for seamanship, Shaw," said the junior examiner who presided over the room where the written examination was being held. As I left the room I met a fellow-student at the college—he seemed very crestfallen.

"That swine's sent me back to sea for six months, because I was wearing a buttonhole!" he cursed. "Pitched the papers in my face, too—I told him they'd stay there until he handed

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them back to me; and he had to do it; so—God help you!"

My heart quailed; my soul descended to my boots. Captain —— normal, was bad enough; Captain —— enraged, was a threat of hell. We knew him for a most unreasonable man; hot-tempered, terribly unjust; and I have often wondered since why he was permitted to retain the position he held. I take it that an examiner's plain duty is to discover the little a candidate does know rather than the much he doesn't know—he's no executioner with ax and block, but a benign counsellor—or should be.

I knocked at the door; a thunderous bellow of "Come in!" answered.

I put my face round the edge of the door— "She's all aback, for'ard!" Captain —— bellowed. Ah; but we'd been put wise to that little trick! I gave the answers as instructed before crossing the threshold.

"Come in!" he growled. "Taken aback for'ard, you haven't time to think, you've to act. Name—papers! Finished your time in steam—why were your indentures cancelled? Swallowed the anchor, eh? What do you know about a ship? You've only got four years and one day's sea-time in."

"Four years and two days," I said; "and that qualifies me to sit."

"Ah! does it? We'll see, then, we'll see!" he said bitterly. "What do you think you know about a ship?" I realized then that I knew nothing; my brain was a void. Everything I'd learnt had vanished; I'd failed—I knew that I'd failed. "You young scroungers come along here knowing as much about a ship as a cow knows about handling a musket," he raved; "and expect me to pat your backs and say what wonderful chaps you are! The sea's overcrowded, anyhow—no chance for promotion! Ought to stop all examinations for five years! Rule of the road first—here!" He had models carrying imitation lights on his table. I was supposed to be in a ship on various tacks; I had to tell exactly what to do as he shifted the lights about. No time for clear thought; one stumbled blindly along, answering for the most part at random.

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His hands played with the lights as a juggler's with the glittering balls. "Close-hauled port tack, see green light here—what'd you do?" "Running free, see these lights here, what'd you do?" There were dozens of questions of that sort, rattling like machine-gun fire; a second's hesitation was cursed.

"A deuce of a lot you know!" he growled presently. "Take that steamer model; you are in charge of her deck. You see a red light—here; what'd you do?" I did it, always stumbling. Apparently he was satisfied; he took another model. "Article 23, Rule of the Road!" he snapped; I recited it. In the middle he interrupted me: "You've carried away your main royal in a gale of wind—what'd you do?" I told him. He set me in an imaginary ship with the shifted cargo, on her beam-ends, rudderless, and required me to set matters right.

"Why've you done that?" was his almost parrot-like cry. His object was to bewilder and rattle me, and cause me to flounder. In the very middle of a prolonged discussion about the rigging of sheer-legs wherewith to raise an imaginary jury-mast, his hands, always busy, would suddenly shift one of the imagination lights, and: "Duty?" came the bark. I answered: and: "Quote article," he said with all the vehemence of a curse. An examination of that character is not a genuine test of sailorly knowledge, I contend; for even at sea you have a moment for thought if you know your job. And I have found very many remarkably efficient seamen who were absolutely trustworthy in the most appalling emergencies, who were utterly unable to come successfully through the ordeal of the examination-room.

I was presently sweating as if I'd run a mile under a tropical sun; but as I hadn't had my papers chucked in my face I began to think I might survive. He asked me details of the duties I should expect to perform as second mate of a seagoing windjammer; and I answered.

"God help the ship that gets you as second mate!" sneered he. "Your cargo's afire down the after hold—duty?" I brought the ship head to wind to prevent the flames from

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spreading forward; I battered down my hatches and carved holes in the deck to admit the hose, in accepted style. I was required to break away and tack the ship as she was endeavouring to claw off a lee-shore: I did it, and during the manœuvre he devised a dozen emergencies, not one of which was at all likely to happen. But, lathering now, not only sweating, I survived.

Presently: "That'll do!" he snarled. My heart dropped —I'd failed. Six months at sea would be the smallest portion of my punishment. But he didn't kick me out of the torture chamber. Nay, he actually turned and looked out of the window, leisurely filling a pipe the while. I would have given worlds for opportunity to sit down, for my legs were ashake beneath me, but no invitation was extended. He, however, seated himself, drew a book towards him. "Here you are!" he growled, and handed me the coveted blue-paper slip as evidence that I'd passed; the paper that would entitle me to a certificate of competency as second mate of a deep-water sailing ship, square-rigged and of any tonnage known to mankind. I felt then as if I could have kissed his saturnine face.

"What school did you go to?" he asked, and when I told him: "They know their job, those young fellows," he said. "I intended to fail you as soon as I saw you; I didn't like the looks of you—too dandified for a windjammer second mate. But you've passed. Don't come up before me again without a decent margin of seatime, that's all." Those old-timers had the idea that no man could learn his job in a bare four years: perhaps they were right. It takes a man an entire lifetime to learn the outer fringe of seafaring.

Still I'd passed. I raced from the room, and out I went to realize what heaven on earth can be. The porter at the door of the building saw the blue paper flaunting, he wished me well. I gave him one of my few remaining half-crowns and wished it had been a fiver.

Less than twenty-one and second mate: things weren't shaping so badly. I conveyed the Nautical School across to a place of refreshment favoured by embryo officers, and the

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tow-headed barmaid kissed me, I know, and we all drank a great deal more beer than we should have done, and another barmaid told me there was a ship requiring a second mate lying in such and such a dock, and didn't I think that was worth a visit to the theatre?

But I was so utterly penniless by this time that I had to wire home for cash to pay my lodgings and my railway fare. Not wishing to be a burden on the indifferent family finances, I cast about for employment as soon as possible, and was appointed third mate of a River Plate steamer.

The pay wasn't high—only five pounds a month—but the ship was a good one, commanded by a veteran who had never passed an examination in his life, but who had been granted a "servitude ticket." He was a first-class sailor, but I know he was at least eighty years old then, and probably much more. He was a good friend to me, and that year as third mate passed pleasantly, though without much adventure. We went to the Plate, thence to New York, down to Santos and Rio—yellow fever was playing Old Harry ashore in those unhygienic times, and the men were dying at their jobs—and at Rio I was offered an appointment as navigating officer of a ship intending to run guns to Cuba. But I didn't accept the opening: sometimes I wish I had. The skipper of the gun-runner was a likeable man, and as near to Cutcliffe Hyne's conception of Captain Kettle as man could be. He was chased ashore on one of his hazardous ventures, set fire to his ship, and disappeared from human ken. Probably he established himself as a king of some unknown colony, for he was of the genuine adventuring type: a man whom no anchors could hold to permanent moorings. He was only born a couple or three centuries too late: he would have been a second Drake, had the accident of his birth not been delayed. Some of his exploits were sufficiently hair-raising to supply any writing man with unfailing copy for adventures of the most hectic type. He had deliberately gone in search of the unusual and hazardous throughout the days of his manhood: and once—but he was more than slightly intoxicated on this occasion—he voiced a

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scheme he had for a raid on the Japanese pearling beds. He had long ago looted the Russian seal-rookeries and got away with it, but he squandered his ill-earned gains.

One meets with queer and intriguing personalities along the world's water-fronts. One man I discovered in Brazil, then a home for human derelicts, had been a clergyman in an English parish: he was then a chuckerout in a low gambling joint into which no self-respecting man strayed without a revolver ready to his hand. You'd find slouching beachcombers, dead to all human interests, steeped in liquor which they cadged as best they could, never working for it, who could construe an ode of Pindar's without a flaw, and who boasted that they'd won high academic degrees in their mother universities. Drink was the cause of their downfall in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, of course, and the hundredth cause was inevitably a woman.

It was tragic to see, down there in Rio and Santos, the hulks of what had once been good ships rotting sullenly at their moorings. Yellow Jack had found them out, their crews had died to the last man, fresh crews had been sent out from home and they in their turn had died of the dreaded plague, and so the ships had been abandoned. Some of them taken over by the local authorities had been converted into hospital hulks, of which bizarre stories were told in covert whispers—stories of men, entering into the worst phase of "el vomito," being smothered under mattresses to put a period to their agonized sufferings: of men burned alive, seen to move, indeed, as the flames encircled them. Yellow Jack was no joke in those days. We got it aboard, and men simply dropped like poleaxed cattle. I was invited to breakfast aboard a German liner, her chief officer being my host. I learnt to hate the Germans in after days, but this was as charming a man of the sea as I have ever met: courteous, well-read and a really brilliant talker. He and I fore-gathered in a concert hall ashore, where the Brazilians endeavoured to forget their terror of the plague in riotous living: for all the world like lost souls dancing on the thin edge of doom, and it was no unusual

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thing for a dancer to reel from the arms of his partner and collapse in the "vomito" agonies on the floor.

There'd been a row, I remember: knives were drawn, trouble seemed imminent, and in the following imbroglio I was able to be of some small service to the German officer. Two men were stabbed and one was so cruelly slashed across the face during the evening's entertainment as to be a living horror—for in the main the South American uses the edge of his knife in preference to the point, unless he can throw it —and we two congratulated ourselves on escaping skin-whole. It had been a hectic ten minutes or so, and the blood still tingles in the veins at memory of it. Youth is a great possession!

I breakfasted with my German friend in the first-class saloon of that palatial liner, in the South American fashion, with champagne instead of tea, and oysters as a commencing dish. That would be at ten-thirty or thereabouts. At noon my friend was down with Yellow Jack, at four o'clock I attended his funeral! The scythe had swept unerringly.

On the evening we left Santos, bound for a trifling port named Victoria, I remember, as I took the bridge at eight o'clock, being perfectly convinced that the plague had me. I'd an imagination, I felt every symptom: and I analyzed them every one, thinking of my dead friend, who had taken a vow that, in the event of any war breaking out between Britain and Germany—and thought of the ultimate war was in the air, even at that day!—he would show me all war's finest courtesies; and, one way and the other, I suffered every pang and horror of the plague, until, determined not to succumb, I stripped to the skin, and using the awning-stretchers as horizontal bars, put in three hours of the most strenuous gymnastic exercise I have ever performed in my life, and literally sweated the disease out of my system. But we buried three of our crew before we reached Victoria, sewed them up in old canvas and weighted them with burnt-out firebars, and sent them overboard with briefly muttered words of committal.

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Victoria of those days was wildish. There was a small British colony of coffee growers and their foremen and clerks, perhaps eight white men in all, and all had quarrelled prior to our visit there. The town was overawed by some Brazilian bandit who, with his band, hid up in the neighbouring well-wooded hills and was about as elusive as the famous Pimpernel. His happy little habit was to ride pell-mell into the town about the siesta hour, shoot it up generally, collect such loot as was easily available, together with a young girl or two, and then gallop back to his fastnesses. We grew quite accustomed to hearing a fusillade of shots during the hotter hours of the day, but the local police were indifferent marksmen. The white colony only looked on the affair with tolerant amusement, until the brigand, whose name I have forgotten, plucked a half-caste girl favoured by one of the whites on the veranda on which she slept, and bore her off to solace his hours of idleness. Then the fat was in the fire with a vengeance and the quarrelsome whites banded together in common cause, spent three hectic days in the hills, and smoked out that gang of freebooters so effectively that there was no more trouble for many a day.

We took a load of coffee berries to New York, calling in at Pernambuco to fill up with raw sugar, and here at Pernambuco I was like to lose the number of my mess. For we had aboard us valuable cargo for the port, and as the Brazilian stevedore was apt to pilfer, and as I was responsible for the safe delivery of that cargo, I spent my time in the hold, overlooking the discharging. One hulking fellow, half Italian, I think, half Indian, deliberately ripped open a case of boots under my very eyes, and I promptly bashed him over the head with the first piece of dunnage wood handy. It floored him, but he jumped up like a scalded cat and came for me with his cargo hook. His intention was to tear away at least half of my face, so I bolted, the lumper after me, with the hook point near my kidneys. The pain was staggering, so I dropped upon him, contrived to wrench the hook away, got another piece of dunnage wood and bashed him about the

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head with it until he gasped. It was strange to realize that he intended to kill me! This half-breed wanted my life, and I realized that I had been fighting for continued existence. I was seeing red; raining blows down on him. But the others pulled us clear and someone filled his mouth with water from a chatty and squirted it into the lumper's face until he recovered. As he came to he gave me a glance and then, with a yell, dashed up the perpendicular ladder and leaped overboard, without pausing for his wages.

I was counselled not to set foot ashore again in Pernambuco, after that experience. I was warned that the half-breed mind is a revengeful mind: that the landing mole would be carefully watched, and that a knife would come, if I ventured to tread dry land, aimed at my throat. So, having learnt to be cautious, I saw nothing of the beauties of the City of the Reef!

And so to New York: the New York of pre-prohibition days: of the old saloons with their vivid pictures of the nude and the hard-faced bunco-steerers who always seemed to have bulging six-shooters in their pockets. New York, I admit, has always bewildered me. Being a sailorman, Fifth Avenue and Broadway were not for me—the Bowery and the lower streets formed my pleasure-ground. A strange city indeed—raw in spots, sophisticated in many others! The Irish policemen would club you if you chanced to look at a pretty girl, and accompany the blow with a raucous: "Now then, rubberneck!" I do not think in all my days that I have ever met a more autocratic tyrant than an Irish-New-York policeman, unless it were a nigger pilot I encountered down in St. Lucia in the West Indies, who gave contradictory orders simply for the purpose of showing his authority.

Always, o' nights, down those Bowery streets, you'd hear the rap-rap of the night-sticks on the pavements—the policeman's signal for assistance or warning. Always turning a corner, you'd chance on some uniformed giant twirling his night-stick, on the look-out for trouble. New York in those days was raw and unfinished: it gave one the impression of a city in

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the making, a city slowly dragging itself from primeval barbarity. You spoke to a man, and he didn't understand your tongue. You went down one hold of your ship to oversee the stevedores, and you might have thought yourself in Italy, for every man there was Italian, as every man in the next hold would be Irish, and in the next Mid-European. The great American nation was still in embryo.

I chanced across a fellow-townsman settled there; he introduced me to joyous souls in the upper ranks of the police force—lieutenants and the like: and in their company I investigated chop-suey joints that were Chinese dope-dens and gambling hells in disguise: I saw the shameful houses—terrible places enough, whose conductors paid a definite scale of bribes to the police—so much to the patrolman, so much to the roundsman, so much to the lieutenant of the precinct: the police themselves told me this and seemed unashamed of the fact—to preserve them against legal action. Tammany scandals were rife, and it was laid down in fair tables precisely the amount required to buy a ward-leader to apply pressure to a judge to dismiss a case! Bribery, so my impression goes, was everywhere: every man had his price, and not a cloudy, evanescent price, but a cold black-and-white scale.

During one of my visits to New York about this time was a purity crusade in progress. I think it was Mrs. Carrie Nation who headed the movement. Saloons were raided by ax-armed women who swept bottles from the shelves and bilged the beer-casks. A Washington senator visited one such place during my first visit, and, seated at a table, ordered refreshment, in payment for which he tendered a ten-dollar bill. The waiter brought change for a five-spot, and when the senator protested he was promptly given the "bum's rush"—that is to say, he was violently flung, half unconscious, into the street. He took the matter up with authority—the assignation house was closed. It was a vast establishment: it was no uncommon spectacle to see the best part of a thousand men and women there at one time, dancing, drinking and flirting.

The proprietor openly boasted that he would reopen within

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a week, in spite of all that Washington could do—and he did!

This was the New York of which O. Henry wrote so tellingly— Lord, how he knew it inside out! I visited the notorious Hell's Kitchen, and the night of my first venture there a black man was lynched—literally torn to pieces by the Tammany gang, for insulting a white woman. Raw, raw—in spite of the glitter of Broadway and the towering splendour of the skyscrapers that give New York's skyline a character possessed by no other city in the world!

In a saloon not far from the Battery I was permitted to shake hands with none other than John L. Sullivan himself! I am not great, but I have touched greatness. He was benign, condescending; and he would always put on the gloves with some aspiring sailorman, so that in the after-time he might boast of having encountered the undefeatable John L. I essayed the honour, but I don't remember much about it, except an excruciating upper-cut that brought all the stars of the firmament into my dazed brain, and a "forty drops" reviver from the famous pug himself, by way of solace.

I feel that I must some day write a book about New York of last century: with its roaring "El," whose supporting pillars seemed especially designed for bringing hansom cabs and ponderous drays to grief; with its Belt Line cars, drawn by horses, where they dragged the cars on to the pavements if necessary, supposing any obstruction were on the line. A great city, an amazing, breathless city, with the millionaires of that day using steam yachts of fifteen hundred tons to bring them down the Hudson every morning, as one uses a Ford to-day, where the fire-escapes of the tenement dwellings down near the harbour were packed tight o' nights by restless sleepers seeking a less fetid air than the interiors of those warrens afforded. A city of vivid contrasts, if ever I saw one!

But our stay in New York was brief. We loaded a general cargo for Rio and Santos, proceeded thither, calling at St. Lucia on the way—passing Martinique at close quarters, and not dreaming of the catastrophe that was later to overwhelm

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St. Pierre, steaming serenely past those lovely West Indian Islands, whose beauty causes the very eye to ache. Discharge cargo at Rio and Santos, load coffee at Santos and Victoria, return to New York, with another call at St. Lucia, was the program. A few familiar faces missing in Santos: such an appalling outbreak of Yellow Jack that the entire ship's company was drafted to breezier, healthier Sao Paulo until the worst of the epidemic was over—that is about all of note concerning that trip, I think. And then from New York, deep-laden with heavy railway material, for Buenos Ayres.

Here again was a wonderful city: orderly, progressive; where the great national newspaper *La Prensa* ran its own public dispensaries and charities in a fashion I have never seen equalled, where courtesy was everywhere—except at such times as when minor revolutions flared into being. One such broke out soon after our arrival. The edict went forth that no work was to be done at the docks; but the railway cargo we carried was urgently required by one of the rapidly growing railways that terminated at the port. We of the ship settled to work to unload: when the bargees went out on strike in sympathy, we took the barges and continued to work. Fine, instructive work, unshipping thirty-ton boilers and engine-frames without the aid of the great hydraulic cranes. I witnessed one tragedy there which might have been deliberately staged melodrama. The white foreman-stevedore was a blasphemous man, a regular thruster. In those days of working out a thirty- or forty-ton lift, he was apt to grow almost too headstrong. I had rigged a spar over No. 2 hatch: a piece of workmanship that might have lifted the bowels of the earth. The foreman's son, a sixteen-year-old lad, drove one of the winches employed in making the lift. The heel of the vast spar was butted against the mast to prevent it slipping: that heel was equipped—I'd seen to it—with heel-tackles. As the strain of that lift came on the spar I noticed the heel-tackles had not been secured to the eyebolts. I shouted to stop operations at once—the foreman shouted me down; blasphemously he declared that he wasn't going to stop for all hell

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and everything else. He raved at his son at the winch, raved at me, springing about like a paper man in a gale of wind. The heel of the spar slipped. Driven by the leverage of that thirty-ton boiler, it screamed out from the mast, but its scream was a whisper compared to that which burst from the foreman's lips as he saw his son crushed flat against the winch he had been driving. Killed outright, mangled unspeakably—and the father, in a paroxysm, hugging the torn clay in his arms and crying—crying as a woman cries to the vanished soul to return!

The strikers came down and poured volleys of revolver shots on us to make their disapproval of these activities. We applied for permission to shoot back, but this was denied. We were, however, supplied with armed guards. One morning a blackleg truck-driver halted his muleteam at our gangway, laced the reins about the footboard, and sauntered over to a neighbouring *posada* for wine or a lottery ticket. A striker ran up and slashed the harness to ribbons, whereupon, without even removing his cigarette from his mouth, one of the *vigilantes* levelled his carbine and blew the striker's brain out at point-blank range! There were noisy demonstrations in Plaza Viente-cinco de Mayo—as noble a public square as human eye could wish to view—and the Governor turned out the National Guard to cope with the disturbance. Being brothers and sons of the strikers, and many of them strikers themselves, the Guard promptly piled arms and refused to act. Many of them took themselves and their equipment to swell the ranks of the embryo revolutionaries. But the Governor of that day was a man of parts. He wasted no breath in expostulations. He wired up-country for a few detachments of Gaucho frontiersmen—half wild guerrillas who would have cut their own mothers' throats for a peso—and when they arrived in the city he turned them loose. On their wiry Pampas mustangs they leaped the barricades, and slashed with their terrible long knives. The Plaza and the neighbouring streets became a shambles, and the revolution subsided with amaz-

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ing suddenness; peace returned to Buenos Ayres, and a willingness to work on the strikers' part.

I like Buenos Ayres: it is a spacious and an imperial city. It is a city of noble boulevards and imposing plazas, of handsome buildings and much progress. In those days it was the rendezvous for the great cattle-owners of the pampas.

These barons came clamouring into the city, where they spent money like water, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves, thinking nothing of a thousand-mile journey for the sake of working off a little surplus steam. But they were more orderly than the North American cowboys. You could tell them at a glance, despite their city clothes: long, lean, bronzed men, with a far-away expression in their eyes, as of those who are accustomed to stare over wide spaces; hail-fellow-well-met with such as they approved, disdainful of such as earned their criticism.

There was horse-racing on Sundays out at Palermo. We carried out to the Argentine some of the finest blood-stock I've ever been privileged to see: for horse-racing down there is not so much a sport as a religion. And every day there was a lottery, to add a zest to life. The man who peddled the morning papers had a stock of tickets with him; one bought either a whole ticket or a segment—a fifth or a tenth—as a matter of course. Chiefly these lotteries were organized by the various municipalities or religious bodies, as a means of raising funds. The customary daily prize was twenty thousand pesos—the Argentine dollar was then worth about one shilling and fourpence. I do not remember the precise cost of the tickets—that varied, of course, as the prize-money varied. But I do know that for a ridiculously small sum you could buy a coupon that qualified you to a share in the hazard—and when you are paid five pounds a month, the chance of winning even a tenth part of twenty thousands dollars is a lure.

Not that I ever won anything, beyond a trifling consolation prize that barely sufficed to buy a dinner for my shipmates; but I met people who did win. By four o'clock in the after-

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noon you knew your fate—before, if you'd won, because the man who'd sold you your ticket would be certain to come down to the docks to apprise you of your good fortune, expecting a share of the loot, of course. One afternoon a one-legged newspaper vendor, who was reputed to have murdered a man and spent many of his years in jail, came hobbling down and burst aboard, waving the coarsely-printed sheet of winning numbers. A gang foreman—an Englishman; and in those days most of the people holding responsible positions in the Argentine were either English or German—had drawn the winning number, and he had bought the whole ticket. It was rather a special lottery—a religious one: the first prize on this occasion was forty thousand dollars. On hearing the news the English gang foreman donned his jacket and blasphemously announced that he'd done his last day's work at stevedoring. He bade all peons cease work forthwith and drink their skins full at his charges. He walked ashore at the head of an elated procession, and that was the last we saw of him—for that spell. Forty thousand dollars is a lot of money —even allowing for a debased exchange it is worth close on three thousand pounds. But when we returned to Buenos Ayres three months or so later, the gang-foreman was once more running his gangway! He'd ridded himself, he told me, of his entire winnings in six weeks, and hadn't a thing to show for it all, except a missing eye that he'd lost in a tavern brawl!

The biggest of all the Argentine lotteries, however, was the annual Christmas Grande, with a first prize of one million dollars. We all bought tickets for that: segments, at least, for the whole ticket cost one hundred and fifty dollars, which was a lot of money when you earned only five pounds a month. But none aboard the *Bellanoch* got it—a shipping agent was the lucky individual. We had a handsome dinner at the winner's expense; indeed, for the few days immediately following the declaration, Christopherson kept open house.

But apart from the excitement of the lottery, an occasional visit up-town, a Sunday at the races, there wasn't much to

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do for us sailormen. Lord—the nights and nights I spent tallying salt hides! Christmas time, remember, south of the Line, where the midday heat ran up to the hundred and ten mark, and the nights seemed even warmer, with a sodden, humid atmosphere that rendered one so limp that it required half an hour's steady concentration before it was possible to secure energy enough to lick the point of a pencil! And the salt hides coming aboard in chain slings, and an Argentino tally-clerk counting them out in a voice that was like a rasp of a file on steel—"Une, duo, tray, quarto, cinco, sieze, siete, ocho, neuvo, tally, Piloto!" The stench of the hides, the drifted dust from the wharf, a wind that seemed to escape from the mouth of a ten-times heated furnace, the clashing of railway wagons on the rails, the bursts of the rockets as the priests fired them to chase away the evil spirits always supposed to be hovering about the spires of their stucco churches—Buenos Ayres had an atmosphere all its own. Midnight sounding and the work-gangs knocking off; the stench of the harbour assailing one's nostrils, as one sought a stifling cabin under an iron deck on which the sub-tropical sun had been blazing persistently: tossing from side to side in sleepless agony, with all the mosquitoes ever created humming metalically about, and all the bugs ever bred attacking from below—and yet I retain delightful memories of Buenos Ayres, its spaciousness, its newness, and its progress.

We filled up with grain for home. It was ordained by the agents, who sat at home at ease, that, to increase the owners' profits and, incidentally, their own commissions, we should carry a deck cargo of cattle and sheep. We were entrusted with the safe conveyance of two hundred and fifty head of prime bullocks, and something like eighteen hundred sheep. These would be shipped at Monte Video, lying at the outer mouth of the River Plate. Raw lumber was piled aboard us and skilled carpenters accompanied us down the river, whose yellowish colour has undoubtedly given rise to its name.

We went ashore four times during the down-river trip. The pilot did not seem to mind: said the river sand would

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clean our bottom plates. His coolness was different from the excitability of the mud-pilot who brought us out of the excellent docks. For the mud-pilot, if anything went the least bit wrong, as always happens when bringing a big ship through narrow dock-gates, promptly lost his head, threw down his hat and danced on it, and split the air with spitting Spanish-Italian oaths of growing crescendo force. Spanish-Italian is a fine mixed tongue for cursing. Golfers, please note!

Cattle-fittings in place we loaded our living cargo. Fine steers were brought off in lighter-loads and slung aboard by the horns. They were housed with much yelling and tail-twisting: the poor brutes were terrified out of what wits they had. For downright brutality commend me to a Latin-American cow-hand. One bullock took charge and drove through an alley like a shell; it there met a donkeyman, blundered past him, kicked and trampled him, but he was a Glaswegian and suffered no real injury. We got the bellowing, bewildered brutes aboard somehow, with only one cattle-hand gored to death. On a platform above them the sheep were embarked—a simple process. From the lighters containing them a gangway was rigged, a bell-wether was led aboard, and the rest followed eagerly, flowing into their appointed pens like controlled streams of water. Then we embarked fodder for the lot, piling it everywhere, almost to the top of the funnel, in the life-boats, banking it high about the navigating bridge. Life for the first week after weighing anchor at Monte Video was an incessant scramble over scrubby bales of alfalfa. There were also flies. At sunset, if one were careless enough to neglect the closing of his cabin port and door, he would find on entering that not one square inch of white paint was visible for the noisy swarms of great blue-bottles: dirty insects, bred in filth. If you sealed door and port, and burnt sulphur on a red-hot shovel, they fell and carpeted the floor. I have never seen so many flies, even in the war-time trenches.

The ship was an unpleasant place to live in. Our cabins were stenchful, unbearable. The cattle seemed to be everywhere—

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the cattle-hands and their *capatazes* created a discordant note. They were an objectionable lot—gutter-scourings, who were working a passage for the sake of a few poor dollars. They tried a mutiny because of the quality of the food supplied them, and we had difficulty in bringing them to hand. They struck work, refused to clean the increasing filth: the ship going through the tropics was unspeakable. Bullocks died, and, as they were so closely packed that it was impossible to heave the carcasses out, they were hacked to pieces where they fell and shoved overboard. Our new captain was sickening for the insanity that later led him to attempt suicide: the burden fell on the shoulders of us two juniors—neither of us widely experienced in control. Dowie, the acting mate, was about twenty-four; I was twenty-one. The skipper, after an altercation with the chief *capataz*—foreman of the cattlemen—locked himself in his cabin and sulked. He used to sneak out by stealth in the middle watch and join me on the bridge, there to agonize me with his woes. He had quarrelled with Dowie some considerable time before. A ship is a hotbed of gossip, of course, and the "old man" said everything he thought about the mate: his ability, his appearance, his morals, and his general character.

It was a queer existence. One sweltering night in the Doldrums, when there was just enough breeze aft to becalm the ship and send the funnel smoke vertically upwards, when not a breath of air stirred, when the sweltering cattle were restless, groaning and surging, and even the mild sheep were suddenly scudding from end to end of their creaking pens, the skipper hauled himself wearily to the bridge and complained that he could not sleep on account of the cold. I didn't want him up there just then. An imagination that has always been a mixed blessing and curse was leading me into a bewitching land of faery, where everything happened just right. About this time I was discovering that the best way to escape from present discomforts was to imagine something really delightful, and imagine it so hard that for the time being it was more real than the actuality that surrounded me. That any man

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should complain of the cold on such a night staggered me. I would have given my immortal soul for the sound of ice tinkling against a tumbler's rim. I had sluiced my pyjama'd self with tepid water from the fire-buckets on the bridge, but that seemed to dissolve into steam.

I recklessly suggested a hot-water bottle in his bunk. He jumped at the suggestion: the only difficulty was that the ship was unfurnished with such luxuries. But he calculated that if he collected a boiling kettle from the galley and plugged up the spout with a cork and lashed down the lid with ropeyarns, he'd get the heat he wanted. When I was relieved at about half-past four by my opposite number, I visited the captain's room. The door was shut, as were the ports. I knocked and entered. He had a huge oil-stove going full-blast, and the steam-heater turned on to its ultimate extent. The atmosphere of the cabin was indescribable, but he complained that the cork had come out of his kettle spout and that his bunk was flooded. So I left him to make the best of it—phew!

There were knife-fights amongst the cattle-hands by way of variety, and some obscure disease affected the cattle themselves as we wallowed dirtily northward. The poor beasts died like flies; they were hacked to pieces and pitched overboard. I believe they were infected before they came aboard and the shippers knew it: they simply made a bid for insurance, which they ultimately got.

In the Bay of Biscay we ran into a heavens-hard gale. I have tried throughout many years to do adequate justice to that gale, and I feel I have failed. We estimated the strength of wind during the fiercer squalls at one hundred and twenty miles an hour. The ship, overladen as she was, was like a half-tide rock. Fortunately there was no sail to handle—we simply couldn't have done it, for our economical crew numbered only six deck-hands, including the lamp-trimmer. Having no sail to steady us, we rolled and plunged like an hysterical chip in a whirlpool. The entire clumsy superstructure took charge, bursting away from its temporary supports. At every roll,

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cattle, fittings, fodder and cattle-hands went surging wildly to the lower side, to mass there, a horror, with white water lashing the confusion into awfulness. Sea after sea slogged down on the bleating, bellowing medley, then the next roll came and they all slid together to the other side, breaking legs, impaling themselves on the winch handles, jamming themselves helplessly between the masts, hatch-coamings and winches. I constituted myself a member of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, collected all the revolver cartridges I could find, and spent a watch below in shooting such of the helpless brutes as were broken-limbed. Fully fifty I shot that day, I remember, and nasty, messy work it was—shoulder-deep in swimming filth, with the fear always tearing at the soul-roots that the entire superstructure would be washed bodily overboard. It was indeed a nightmare of horror. The sheep of course bore the brunt of it, for they were on the flimsy sheep-deck, which swayed and bent and broke to their weight, as they were pitched in bewildered groups of a hundred or so this way and that.

I suggested heaving-to: the skipper derided the idea. But when he went below I did heave-to, with the second engineer sworn to report engine-room defects if trouble arose. Not that she was much easier then, even. As for such cattle as were not injured or dead, they needed water and food—the cattlemen failed them, and it was necessary to drive our own deck-hands on to perform the duties. A lovely life, cattle-running, under those conditions! Water was entering the holds: what was more, it was impossible to unship the ventilators and plug their bases. The hatch-covers were splitting, the tarpaulins were ripped from end to end by ragged timbers. One portion of the sheep-deck collapsed entirely, dropping its bleating, bewildered load on to the fore-hatch, caving it in so that something had to be done to save the ship's very life. We unshipped the derricks and chained them over the broken hatchway, dug out tarpaulins and awnings and coal-blackened sails, and put a homeward-bound patch on the damage that enabled us to keep afloat. This was mule work, for we lacked

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men, and it was not possible to clear the winches to use steam. It was done, somehow—the ship rolling her heart out meanwhile, and the big water pouring over her.

Oil from the for'ard scuppers didn't do much good. It broke the weight of the seas a little, but in no wise lessened the ship's uneasy motion. It was agonizing to hear the thresh and scurry and thud of the poor cattle as they swung from side to side. They broke loose from the broken pens, snapping their head-ropes, and floundered wildly. One bullock actually reached the navigation bridge in its terror, and, stumbling there, broke its leg. It drove me up the ladder of the pole compass before it was rendered *hors de combat*—it was as mad as a bull could be.

But the gale subsided, and we had opportunity to estimate the damage. Less than thirty bullocks remained alive, not more than two hundred sheep. The ship was a pest-house. It meant unceasing work by night and day for the matter of fifty-six hours before we were able to reduce any sort of order out of chaos, and the *capatazes,* who were responsible for the care of the cattle, recovering from their sea-sickness, raved at us, threatening unmentionable punishments for the evil that had been done.

We made the Channel, ran up Thames to Deptford, and landed our sorry remnant. Our main cargo was consigned to Antwerp, and as ships carrying temporary cattle fittings were not permitted to enter the port, we were required to tear everything down and dump it overboard, shovel away all accumulations of filth, and so cleanse the ship that no trace of her degradation remained. This meant another all-hands' job as we slowly steamed across the North Sea, with the skipper keeping the bridge and the officers working with the men. But we took a superficially clean ship into Antwerp, and were very glad to get there.

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CHAPTER XVI

FROM TRAMP TO LINER

BEING required by a captain, whose knowledge of English was not perfect, to draw up a statement of business for the owners, I did my best, and when Captain Nerisen read my effort he said: "You oughtn't to be bucking about at sea—you ought to be an author." I think that was my first inspiration towards authorship. The observation made no very clear impression on me at that time: my ambitions were still centred in commanding an Atlantic flyer.

The *Bellanoch* went to Brazilian ports, Rio and Santos, discharged, reloaded, went to New York, with a call at Santa Lucia, where the negroes sang spirituals, although they weren't called spirituals in those days, as they ran the coal aboard, where the black men practised real chivalry, in so far as they ran with coal baskets for the women and allowed them to take the tallies that represented so much of earnings for labour done.

"How do you arrange the work here?" I asked one son of Ham, on whom the streaks of coal-dust seemed pale.

"De ladies carries de coals, sah, normally, an' de gemlums trims de coals in de bunkers," he replied with gravity. "You gotta trifle for me, sah?" They were all born cadgers, of course—prepared to do anything for an English shilling: but, when work was finished, and they paddled themselves across the beautiful harbour towards their homes, they sang Sankey and Moody hymns in a fashion that brought a man's heart into his throat.

From New York the *Bellanoch* was ordered to Liverpool. I welcomed this, for by the time we reached a home port my time would be completed for mate. Going across the Atlantic I found myself living in a whirl of fantasy. I used, during my

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night watches, to imagine what would happen in the event of anything unexpected taking place—such as a man falling overboard. I went through the movements—always in imagination: got off the commands to the helmsman, the instructions to lower away a boat, the need to have a life-buoy handy. Gradually an idea permeated into my brain—supposing a man did fall overboard in that fashion? Supposing a man who hated him by reason of rivalry for some girl's affection happened to be on the bridge at the time! What would the responsible man do?

That is how I got my first idea for writing stories. Not that I'd any intention of doing anything of the sort at that time, but my imagination was working.

We got to Liverpool, and as my sea-time was correct, I went to the Board of Trade office there and sat for mate's examination, sneaking through without disgrace. I took on night duty in order to give myself freedom in daytime to sit for the exam, and returned aboard the *Bellanoch* a qualified mate. Here was another step on the road. But, on the day I qualified a bigger ship of the line chanced to need a second mate: I was appointed. So far, so good. I shifted my dunnage aboard the bigger ship, and went with her, as second mate, to Glasgow. Whilst we were lying in Queen's Dock, along came the *Bellasco,* commanded by my old friend Captain Robertson. He saw me standing on the deck, and as soon as his ship was docked, came imposingly aboard.

"What're you doing here?" he asked.

"Second mate, sir," said I proudly. He snorted.

"Wasted!" he said, and stalked ashore. An hour later I was instructed to transfer to the *Bellasco.* I completed my time in her for master's examination.

We took the *Bellasco* out through Magellan Straits to the West Coast, with a general cargo.

In Smythe's Channel we put her ashore. Smythe's Channel is a particularly poisonous stretch of enclosed water, running from Magellan proper to the Pacific. It is a short cut, and because of the vile ten-knot tides that run there, it is more

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or less forbidden for night navigation. However, Robertson, in his splendid self-sufficiency, decided that he was quite competent to take his command through by night.

I was his navigating officer, and opposed to the plan. Still, an officer doesn't argue with a skipper. In the wind-driven gloom of a typical July night we sighted a light.

"Maldonado Point!" grunted the skipper. "See to it!" Assuming that it was, I set a course to clear the cape. But it wasn't the shore light at all. That hadn't been lit for three weeks, we afterwards heard, because all the lamp-glasses were used up. What we saw was the light in the window of a farm-house several miles inland. But we steered to clear that light and, naturally enough, the ship took the ground. As soon as she touched we stopped and reversed engines, but couldn't get her off. We'd gone ashore on the very crest of a high spring tide. When daylight came six hours later and we looked about us, the water was forty feet below us: we were lying high and dry on a sandbank, and our bow was pointing directly towards one of the outbuildings of a lonely farm. So we pushed a ladder overside and went to the farm, where we got some welcome fresh milk and eggs. Then we dispatched a boat to Punta Arenas with the news and requests for a salvage crew. Whilst the boat was away the Tierra del Fuegan natives—wiry and debased, ranking with the Bushmen of Central Africa and the Aborigines of Australia—crowded about the ship. They came from Tierra del Fuego in dug-out canoes. They were stark naked, men and women alike, but they had a craving for clothes, because if we threw them the straw-covering of a whisky bottle it was promptly converted into a kilt. If a bottle was pitched to them they caught it eagerly, broke it and ground down the fragments to make spear- and arrow-heads.

They got ugly at times, however: and showed their displeasure in flights of arrows, tipped with glassy fragments.

They tried to board us, to secure loot, one presumes, and we beat them back with the steam-hose. They could stand revolver-fire, and they could stand battering with hatch-

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battens, but they could not stand steam. In the intervals we officers went ashore and visited that outlying farm, mounted the farmer's horses and went hunting guanacos: chanced across detached bodies of veritable Patagonians—giant men these, who disdained artificial coverings and stalked abroad in breech clouts alone, although the temperature was much about the same as an average British winter.

Having gone ashore on top of a high spring tide, there was really nothing to do but wait for the next—a month later. Salvage tugs came out from Punta Arenas and tried to tow us off, but failed. We jettisoned a certain amount of cargo, and ultimately were towed into navigable water, having suffered no damage worth mentioning, beyond the month's delay. The captain's ticket was saved by reason of the Maldonado Point light not being lit, and our attempt to navigate a forbidden channel was winked at by the Court of Enquiry.

Afterwards we coasted up and down the Chilian and Peruvian coasts, picking up a parcel here, dropping it there: were ordered to the River Plate to complete for home, went home to Dunkirk, thence to Antwerp, thence to Glasgow. Thick fog all the way, during this trip—it took us fifteen days to complete a journey that normally shouldn't have taken more than three, and as the mate had left in Antwerp to be married, I was acting-mate, with all the responsibility in the world on my shoulders. I suggested to the skipper that he should take a fair share in the watch-keeping, but he waved my protestations airily aside, and said that it would do me a lot of good.

"Give you experience—experience is what you youngsters need," he grunted. I got a lot of mixed experience during that slow crawl. Gales are bad enough, but I would rather ten gales than one fog at sea. We seemed everlastingly to be twitching the ship from the jaws of destruction. Incidents might be detailed, but—I find the memories of those younger days crowding out more poignant memories of the war-years.

Suffice it that, after a couple more voyages, I found myself with sea-time enough to warrant my going up for master;

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and, having passed that exam—much more trying than the second mate's—I decided that I might as well go up for extra master as soon as possible, as once a man gets to sea with a master's ticket, he seldom cares to lie off long enough to sit for the extra exam. It meant study—close study—but after a fortnight I presented myself for the five days' ordeal, and was successful in weathering that particular lee shore.

Fully qualified, I visited my neglected home. Twenty-three years old only, possessor of an extra-ticket: the whole round world was merely a football for my magnificent spurning.

During the time of waiting for a new berth, I chanced to read in a copy of the *Captain,* a statement that the editor would be pleased to consider stories from readers.

In preparing for my extra-master's exam, I had to write essays on storms and their definite laws, on magnetism and its indefinite vagaries. Copies of these essays my father read, and seemed interested: he said he had learnt a lot of casual knowledge from them, and others might do the same. I scoffed at the thought: but, after reading that editor's invitation, I found a story told me by a Norwegian skipper nagging away in my brain. One day I sat down and wrote it. It was a weird and wonderful story, about a mutiny on the high seas. As written the yarn seemed utterly without form and void: it was illiterate, unparagraphed. But I had the temerity to send it in, and then forgot all about it.

One day, when I was away from home, a wire came from my father:

"*Captain* accepts Mutiny, three guineas," I read. I was an author! Imagine the dreams! Imagine the planning, the imaginative investment of surplus royalties! Before I went to bed that night I had magnificently seen myself the most famous author in history—but authorship was not enough. I would go into Parliament, I vowed, become Prime Minister, sway the policies of all civilization. I'd spent good years in qualifying for one profession, and I'd found another leap into my arms readymade, without the slightest training.

It was as well to earn money, however, so I returned to sea:

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in Atlantic flyers, this time. My first story—my cherished brain-child—was not published, the magic three guineas did not eventuate: and a man must live. So I secured an appointment in the Cunard Line, and, although the duties there were arduous, I put in much spare time writing—always writing. The stories came back as unerringly as carrier pigeons return to their homenests.

Six months elapsed and the Mutiny story was published. I received the cheque for three guineas on a return to Liverpool, and I think no money ever earned by human being caused greater pleasure than that.

The Atlantic Ferry—Liverpool to Boston and New York—was an experience well worth while. For the first time I was amongst passengers, people with a different outlook from the seafarers amongst whom my lot had been cast.

Mr. Phillips Oppenheim crossed with us on one occasion: he was then just climbing to the crest of his well-deserved popularity with "Mysterious Mr. Sabine," and books of that ilk. He spoke to me: I told him I hoped to rise to his heights. He laughed and advised me to stick to the sea, which was a man's life: he wished he'd been trained as a sailor. But he was travelling saloon, honoured by the whole ship; invited to write leading articles for the *Bulletin* that was published each voyage, and which I vaingloriously edited. I decided on continuing to write.

North Atlantic voyaging brought me into touch with newspaperdom in Boston: a remote relative, one of the countless "editors" on a U. S. paper's staff, found me out and took me to see the workings of his paper; I was asked to write an article descriptive of a winter Atlantic voyage, and this I did—commissioned work. The pay was indifferent, but very probably not more indifferent than the article, and the mere fact that I'd written for the newspaper gave me the freedom of the sub-editors' rooms, where I was eyewitness and earwitness to the startling ramifications of sensational American journalism.

Much about this time Colonel Cody—Buffalo Bill—im-

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ported a body of Russian Cossacks into America to assist him in his Wild West Show. One of the wild riders of the Steppes died in mid-ocean, and following the custom in the Cunard Line, the dead man was embedded in ice in one of the lifeboats, for burial ashore. The usual reporters flocked aboard at quarantine on the ship's arrival, the story went the rounds. Before the first passenger set foot on American soil the newspapers were out with the news. I kept a copy of that illuminating bit of journalism for many years:

"BUFFALO BILL'S COSSACKS HAVE ARRIVED—ONE ON ICE!"

was the scare head-line. U.S. journalism was lacking in the stately reserve of the British Press. I know the reporters used to board us and ask for stories, and if we showed any reticence they threatened to publish such a story as they deemed suitable for the occasion, whether true or imaginative. No law of libel ran in the States, even the most intimate domestic secrets were not sacred from the Press, which lived on sensationalism.

But I learned a good bit about the actual value of written matter in the Boston newspaper office!

Also, I learned a good deal about the better type of American: the New England brand, who had failed to move with the headlong times. Good friends I had amongst the Harvard University circle, and met learned professors of exquisite manners who spoke the most perfect English I have ever heard, men who spoke as Ruskin wrote: who mentioned Henry James almost cavalierly, who worshipped Meredith, and who deplored the advance of sensationalism. Learned judges and doctors and lawyers foregathered at the home of my friends in Massachusetts Avenue, and the debates held there nightly were educative. One felt he must read hard to keep pace with these high-brows. Wise in their generation, they hailed the rising of an Eastern star by name of Joseph Conrad: they vowed that he would be the foremost writer of British prose

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as soon as humanity recognized his qualities. They were not far wrong, though it took many a year for Joseph Conrad to come into his inheritance. For of all the men who ever took the sea for his medium of expression, that Polish master of British ships understood its true inwardness the best. I, who have seen it in a thousand different moods, in peace and war, say this: Joseph Conrad conveyed the real impression, none better, none nearly so well. May his big soul rest in peace! He taught me much: I wish I'd been a better pupil!

The ensuing months brought a bit of promotion, brought, too, the sales of certain stories. One paper, long since defunct, wrote asking for more. It seemed like success! I used to think out stories on the upper bridge o' nights as the flyer hurled through the smother of a North Atlantic screamer, with the weighty greybacks flattening her ventilators and tearing at the supports of her bridge, washing away the lifeboats, freezing where they fell until the whole great ship presented the appearance of a roaming iceberg: when the hundreds and hundreds of Central European emigrants in the steerage were panicking, and could only be kept quiet by armed quarter-masters or the pleadings of their own rabbis: and then, descending to my cabin at midnight or 4 a.m., as the case might be, would sit down to the cheap and nasty typewriter I had bought, and grind the story out, losing much needed sleep, until the overburdened eyes failed to remain alert, and the quartermaster, coming to call me for my next spell of duty, would find me dead asleep over my typewriting machine! But the stories began to sell. I felt they had to sell—advancement in a crack line of mail-flyers was too slow to suit an ambitious youngster.

There was always an element of romance, I remember, when the ship arrived in Liverpool after each voyage across the Westing. The moment I was relieved from duty I hastened to my cabin, where the officers' steward had placed my correspondence. Most of the envelopes were the big self-addressed ones so familiar to literary aspirants, very occasionally was a thin one, bearing the imprint of some magazine-

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publishing firm and containing a terse notification that such and such a story had been found suitable for publication; sometimes, even, there'd be a pleasantly thin envelope containing a cheque. This was real romance, I thought—and I still think so—a romance far keener and more inspiring than any afforded by endless voyaging. Every envelope was an adventure.

Similarly, the arrivals in America were full of expectation, for a man naturally bombarded every magazine office in both countries with his efforts. Not that America was swift to accept me! The big fat envelopes grew less common on the Liverpool side, but I noticed no diminution in their quantity in Boston and New York.

I was probably altogether wrong in considering the short story the proper medium of expression: if I had to live that period over again I should unquestionably concentrate on a novel as a commencement, for what better environment for novel-writing could any man have than a big Atlantic flyer, with regular meals and bed and the certainty of an honestly-earned wage at each voyage end? But I chose the short story—maybe it better fitted with the somewhat spasmodic life lived at sea.

I used the mails as my messengers: never daring to visit a publishing office in person. Editors were, to me, unapproachable beings who simply, in nine cases out of ten, waved to a subordinate to cast out my leprous contributions, or else dictated as few words as were possible to inform me that I had succeeded in gaining their approval.

The writing itch persisted. Sea stories were not required in those days: the sea was too brutal, but stories of an erotic type found favour. I would watch some dainty passenger and imagine all that was likely to happen to her at the end of the voyage: a story of sorts was begotten. I found that though it was inadvisable to use a ship as a character in a story, it was allowable to utilize it as a stage. It was a tedious task learning this art of story-writing, for I had no tutors. Editors, rejecting manuscripts, were naturally too busy to say

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precisely why they'd done so, and gave no reason that might serve as a guide. The only thing to do was blindly to write and write again, send everything written out at hazard and abide by the issues of the Fates. Time was too short to allow of a comprehensive study of the magazines published, so that stories of a particular type might be sent to magazines of a similar type. It is not easy to do full justice to one job for which you're paid, even though inadequately, and carry on another job in your leisure moments. But if you're determined to make a success you simply carry on.

I did the best I could. Leaving out all details of the many crossings and recrossings of the Atlantic Ferry, at the end of eighteen months I found that my writing had brought me in a total sum equal to my official pay. The implacable routine of the Line, which modelled itself severely on the Royal Navy so far as service was concerned, but drifted away from the naval standards when the question of leave cropped up, demanded that I should be transferred to an emigrant ship running between Trieste and New York. Three years were supposed to be the period of this particular service, without even the hint of a week-end's leave. Three years on foreign service to a man who had discovered he could earn as much in his spare time as in his working hours, was too big a proposition. I asked if I might be retained on the Liverpool —U.S. run. I was permitted no favours. It was a case of go on foreign service or resign.

I resigned.

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CHAPTER XVII

SWALLOWING THE ANCHOR

At home I started writing work in deadly earnest: it being a case of root, hog, or die. What lay at the back of my mind was this: I had always the alternative calling of the sea to fall back on in the event of failure. I'd give myself a fair year's chance, writing hard and steadily: if, at the end of the year, I'd failed to justify my faith in myself, I'd go back to sea, admitting myself a failure.

Out of Atlantic ferrying I had gained some useful information, not all of it seafaring. I'd learnt to study humanity, for you can study human nature very thoroughly aboard a big ship during a voyage. You can see carefully drawn veils laid aside; you can see old shibboleths abolished. You can see, as I saw, grave elders flinging a loose leg. You can see deeds of simple friendliness that gladden the heart—as, for instance, when one of our engineers went down with that then mysterious complaint of appendicitis, and the ship's surgeon, who'd never tended a case more alarming than that of sea-sickness or a confinement in the steerage—though I must say that when he inspected the boarding passengers our surgeon always turned back those who seemed likely to increase the ship's complement *en route,* because he didn't like to be interrupted in his game of auction—when the ship's surgeon, then, broadcast an S.O.S. for someone with a medical degree, no matter how obscure, to help him bear the responsibility of actually digging a knife into human flesh, and found a famous British Columbian surgeon in the second cabin who had specialized in abdominal operations, at least two dozen women, from saloon, second cabin and steerage, volunteered as nurses. I helped in that operation. The ship's engines were stopped for an hour, the ship seemed to hold

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its breath. There was an excellent recovery, and the American papers made a fuss about it. But what appealed to me, and still does, was the generosity of those women in offering their services to tend an ailing man whom they had never seen, whose very existence was unknown to them.

I'd learnt something about the vague mysteries of existence. One night, on the bridge, the wireless messenger—and wireless was only just becoming known—brought a fragmentary message in French. A French cruiser—name indecipherable—reported herself in distress and sinking, in a position that was entirely as indecipherable as her name. There was nothing to go on. I called on the captain, we conferred, but the Atlantic was a wide place. It was not particularly heavy weather with us, but it might be exceedingly heavy elsewhere. Anyhow, we had the best part of three thousand human beings under our care, and they could not be risked in a wild-goose chase: furthermore, we were carrying mails, and the mail-contract did not permit of delays. We kept our course, and did nothing—but all the elements of drama were there in this vague, unilluminating message from the ether.

I learnt about chance. It happened that for three years running I reached Liverpool, either in tramp or liner, on the eve of the Grand National. I took no particular interest in racing. But three times running, on the morning of the classic race, my steward wakened me and named the potential winner of the race. They were three different stewards. Each one named the winner, and each winner was a long-odds chance. Shannon Lass, Drumcree, and Moifaa, I think they were. How did those stewards know? They were freshly back from voyaging: they had no opportunity to study form, and yet—they tipped the winner each time!

I'd learnt a lot during the Atlantic years. But, meantime, the thing to do was to make good in the new career. I wrote systematically, not as a spare-time avocation. Successes began to increase. In a year I saw that I was making as good a living as I could have made at sea after a dozen years.

Freelancing, with responsibilities, was an amazing adven-

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ture. I started the real literary life very humbly, on the guarantee of a series of short stories in a weekly magazine, now defunct. I was receiving five pounds per story, each of them not less than ten thousand words long. Best-sellers, please note!

It was a joy to write: ideas came freely, and the first year as a writer justified itself; the second was a definite improvement. After three years in the Lake District I transferred my home to Harrogate, because Windermere was chiefly remarkable for its beauty and its elderly residents. Prior to moving I met an editor.

I also met Frank T. Bullen.

There was a definite reason, of course, for my settling in Windermere. The lurking fear in my mind during the early years, was that I might find the sea-call too irresistible: at any moment I might tire of the prosaic land, pack a few necessaries together and move off towards tide-water. I resolved to live as far from the sea as possible. However, there was a hill outside Windermere crowned with firs which, in a gale, made a noise uncommonly like the hoosh-hoosh of broken water and the strident battle-note of wind-distended canvas.

But it was in Windermere that memorable things happened. First, the meeting with Bullen. The vicar of the parish, Eric Robertson, himself a *littérateur* of no mean order, who had something to do with introducing Rudyard Kipling to a wider audience than India afforded, arranged a series of popular lectures. Some were interesting, some were enjoyable. One of the lecturers was Frank Bullen.

His paper dealt with whaling in old windjammer days, and clean through the record ran the convincing earnestness of one who had seen those things and done those things—this was no lecture compiled from works of reference. Charmed and set vividly aglow, I started for home. I did not count myself worthy to meet the great on their own pinnacles. But —Bullen was even then nearing his death. Acute heart-trouble and bronchitis were wearing him down—the result of his bitter, arduous life. He was due to take tea at the vicarage,

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but he could not climb the hill. The Lake District mostly stands on end, as all who have visited its loveliness will remember.

Our cottage was half-way up the hill. An S.O.S. from the vicar—could we give Mr. Bullen harbourage and tea? We could—tremulous with delight at honour done. And so, for two golden hours, Frank Bullen talked to me, as deep calls to deep. We met on common ground, and I realized, ere the first salty word was properly spoken, that here was a man who understood the sea's magic and mystery as I never should, having braved its greater dangers. We talked books and the art of writing: I admired his style of prose, which always reminded me of the sweep of a mighty river; and he told me why his writing-style always fell into the archaic. For a whaling voyage of three years' duration he had had nothing whatsoever to read save a tattered copy of Holy Writ, which may never be burned or otherwise unreasonably used at sea, and a "Pilgrim's Progress," equally tattered.

Poor Bullen! Even then his popularity was waning, and I think he was finding it a hard matter to live.

So he was really the first established writing-man I had met on terms approaching equality. I treasure the memory of those two hours, for he was a great-hearted man, with no rancour in his soul; a man who seemed, to my mind, eternally astonished that the public troubled to buy his books. He laid his success, I know, at Rudyard Kipling's feet, on account of the preface written to "The Cruise of the *Cachalot*," and not at all to his merits as a fiction writer, though "Cachalot" was plain fact through every one of its sonorous pages.

During those early writing days every morning's post was an adventure; as soon as the postman's step sounded on the path I was down the stairs—not to meet him, for that must have betrayed a lack of reserve, but to wait, half-breathless, whilst the letters were dropped through the slit. One morning brought a thin envelope, in addition to many thick ones. It was a letter that seemed to blaze a trail to El Dorado. It said that a story submitted to the House of Cassell had been

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read with interest, and the undersigned editor would be glad to see more of my work, in view of a new magazine that was already on the stocks.

The next morning's post brought another letter, forwarded from a weekly periodical. The outer envelope contained a letter addressed to me by a pseudonym, asking if I would submit fiction for consideration in view of a new monthly magazine that was about to commence publication. It was signed by the same hand as the first. I replied, to the effect that myself of the first letter and the owner of the pseudonym were the same person. The reply was heartening:

> I don't care who you are, but if you can write stories like . . . I want them.

This seemed success made manifest. Imagine how I poured in the MSS.! All the ancient discards, that no one would buy, were forwarded. Some of them stuck, some were returned, too crass even for favourable consideration. But that was the beginning of a frenzied rush of work. I found eminently fair treatment. If a story failed to please, I was told why; if it were liked—many were—I was equally told why it did. Unsparing in blame, equally unsparing in praise—yes, the treatment was eminently fair.

The ancient House of Cassell, which had been for some time more or less stagnant—where will you find a greater conservatism, save in the Royal Navy, than in an old-established publishing house?—was slow-moving, almost Puritanical in its outlook. I fancy the majority of its shareholders were rural deans and bishops' widows; there was, I found when I visited The Yard for the first time, a cloistral atmosphere about it, the hurl and struggle of modern life hardly penetrated there. But a change was coming in the spirit of The Yard. Young, enthusiastic editors and corpse-revivers seemed inclined to sweep cobwebs away, by informing the place with vigorous blood. After a while the firm declared a dividend—the first for many years.

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I began to take a keen interest in the fortunes of the House. It seemed a worthy attainment: to be associated with the rebuilding of collapsed fortunes. I worked hard to satisfy Cassell's seemingly insatiable demand. They kept me very busy. They were almost merciless in their demands for stories, articles and serials.

I discovered that the more stories one wrote the more one could write. Each story, when half completed, seemed to suggest another. Various writers have various methods of obtaining an objective. Many of them have told me that their custom is to create a set of imaginary characters, and then permit them to work out their own destinies along their own lines, with the author simply guiding and controlling as they show an inevitable disposition to stray from circumspect paths. Others tediously work up and up, rejecting, accepting, trimming and pruning, recasting the plot and revising the characters. For my own part, I found the story itself—the plot, which is the nucleus of a story when all's said and done—leap ready-made into my mind; and then the characters seemed to create themselves and do what was necessary to fulfil the plot.

After a while I began to wonder what sort of place this House of Cassell was, avid for fiction that seemed, in the main, to satisfy its readers. I determined to see for myself, though a trip from Windermere to London seemed more important and portentous than a windjammer trip round the world. I took the plunge and reached Euston. A clang of fire-bells was about the first sound I heard—the brigades went noisily past. A moment later an omnibus broke down, attracting an immediate crowd—within thirty seconds more people were swarming than I'd seen in a year in lovely, sleepy Lakeland.

This was life—movement, an incubating ground for plots!

Then I met my first *bona fide* editors. I presented myself at Belle Sauvage: the famous rabbit-warren of a place that has echoed the tread of many famous feet. I was received.

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I'd learnt to know my editors through correspondence, so we hardly met as strangers.

There was a lunch, at Simpson's in the Strand; the foundations of friendship were laid. I was asked pointblank if I were prepared to accept an agreement whereby the House of Cassell should have first lien on all I wrote. The terms offered were comparatively flattering; and this wage-slave's mind was favourably impressed with the idea of securing an honest-to-God monthly stipend without too much of the element of chance about it. The terms were agreed to, the bond was signed—and still remains in force.

Then followed one of what were to prove many delightful little dinners, which afterwards became a feature of my acquaintanceship with The Yard. Cassell's were collecting about them a selection of writing folks, for their enlarged vision was wide and they were athrob with ideas of expansion. They wanted reliable people: not necessarily literary stars of the first magnitude, but writers who could be trusted to give the sort of copy they wanted; and they collected them through friendship. The first dinner was an event. Charmed names were mentioned: Max Pemberton, then at the very zenith of his well-won fame, with his record of "The Gold Wolf," "The Garden of Swords," "Kronstadt" and "The Iron Pirate"; William le Queux, ambassadorial in manner, with a mysterious suggestion informing him, as though he were in a position to drag down the most imposing social castles and expose the rottenness within. He was freshly back from the turbulent Balkans; and his opinion was that when the Big Show broke out, as everyone knew it must, the first stone would be thrown not far from Serbia. But this was years before Serajevo was anything but a name on a map.

Tom Gallon was there, too, that night: little, unassuming, already stricken with the illness that was to send him to a premature grave; a wise little man, who on many occasions touched the pinnacles of real greatness, though his work never received the attention it deserved, because he lacked

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the power of self-advertisement which nowadays carries meretricious matter to the skies, I find. He talked self-effacingly of his experiences of England's highways, which he had tramped, as a tramp, in search of reluctant health. He told of writing his book, that was just then attracting attention, in common dosshouses, on fragments of paper gleaned from dust-heaps.

Alice and Claude Askew were there, too: with no premonition of the tragic fate the future held in reserve for them to dim their vivacity. Ida Wyllie, Olive Wadsley; little-known then, world-famous now: Warwick Deeping: most of them have climbed to the best-seller class—not swiftly, but quietly, as a result of honest, patient work.

Shop was talked, of course—but it was our own shop and fascinating. We all tried to talk at once, of course—holding our breath for opportunity to dilate on the new heaven and earth the reformed House of Cassell was about to establish.

These little social gatherings continued at intervals, and seemed always to grow in charm. The generous intention was, I am convinced, to bring us into closer touch with the things that mattered: and the system of doing so was instructive and educative. I returned to Windermere fired and inspired, and sat down to create a novel. Like every other first novel of that period it was in some sort a Zenda romance. It sounded all right when finished and read aloud; and in it went for editorial opinion. It was rejected, with a suggestion that it might boil down into a longish novelette for a magazine. It was boiled down to modest dimensions, resubmitted, returned, with a further suggestion that it might make a good short story. I abridged it to six thousand words, sacrificing the odd ninety thousand that had been laboriously written, and in that guise my "Derelict Princess" appeared; my first attempted novel! Apparently the short story was to be my medium to fame.

Undeterred, I embarked on another novel, and it was accepted for publication.

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But, or ever my "Daughter of the Storm" saw the light of day—and she almost died stillborn!—something happened. Peary returned from discovering the North Pole and cast a lie in Dr. Cook's teeth. A controversy wakened, there were recriminations. Walter Smith, book editor at Cassell's, had an inspiration. I received a wire, asking me if I could undertake a juvenile book on Polar exploration, embodying details of the Peary-Cook controversy. Could I deliver the copy within a week? Could I, in the event of my accepting the commission, wire immediate details of incidents suitable for illustrations? I could. I did—I sent off the information on the spur of the moment; then flexed my fingers and set to work. A book in a week seemed a largish order, even for a man who could turn out ten thousand words a day at a pinch. But the book was completed in scheduled time: galley-proofs came daily, as the copy was turned in, the page-proofs were on hand before the last of the galleys had been returned: the book took shape, and "First at the Pole" appeared on November 1st of that year, to stagger a limited public. It was an unprecedented feat of publishing, apparently; for America came out with a book of Polar travel based on the Peary-Cook incident on December 1st of that year and made a song about an important publishing miracle. But steady-going Cassell's had beaten magnetic, dynamic America by a clear thirty days!

This publishing feat skimmed the fine cream from the top of sensation, however. When my much-loved "Daughter of the Storm" came out, a little later, the joy of handling one's first book had gone. The reviewers, having already said nice things about "First at the Pole," assumed that the "Daughter" was another juvenile, though it wasn't—it started out with the idea of being a deep, Conradish sort of tome; it ended up by being sheer, crude melodrama. It drooped and wilted and died, without so much as a second edition. Gone were the golden dreams of a best-seller: there was nothing for it, apparently, but to slog away at pot-boiling short stories, always remembering that Rudyard Kipling, who had said

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nice words about the "Daughter," had made his fame through the medium of the short tale.

Followed then a period of steady work: a colossal output, with circumstances driving a man, against his will, indeed, to entertain juvenile readers. Annually a boys' adventure book saw the light, lived briefly, and disappeared into obscurity. There were no sensational successes; but the fact that the publishers continued to produce the volumes indicated a certain success, or else an optimism seldom found in places where books are made.

Being set down in a country where horses and horsemen abounded, being an ex-sailor, whose every instinct turns towards a horse, I got one and realized a great delight. Having a horse, having written extremely patriotically, especially for my juvenile following, the idea seized me that a little actual practice was demanded from one who preached on duty to one's native land. The German menace was already darkening the political outlook; the fiction of the day dealt with the coming clash. Indeed, hints were given not to write too frequently on the possibility of a German invasion, in case rancour were aroused. But "An Englishman's Home" appeared and aroused discussion; I, feeling it impossible not to, applied for and obtained a commission in the Territorial Force—being posted to a mounted unit of the West Riding Division. It is the busiest man who finds most spare time, I find. Heaven knows, I was busy enough: seldom a day passed when I did not write for a steady, purposeful five hours or more; and with an hour or two's gallop every morning over turf like velvet, through air like champagne, the days glided past like lightning. But the fever of energy persisted. An occasional day with hounds helped; the Territorial drills were enthusiastically attended, for it's no use handling a proposition unless you do it keenly; and yet, in addition to these activities, there was always a brief visit to that old love, the sea: no longer as a working sailor, to be sure, but as an easeful passenger. Joyous jaunts, these, to Norwegian fjords, Mediterranean beauty-spots, and the like; and as a certain

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conversance with many tongues—not fluent in any, but with a smattering of a lot—enabled me to find my way about without guides, I departed from the beaten track on every possible occasion, and had bizarre and amusing adventures that deserve a series of chapters to themselves. For, if you have the spirit of romance at work in your soul, romance always seems to step freely out of obscurity to meet you with welcoming arms.

Not all the adventures were seemly: that is the virtue of the unexpected. But all were enjoyable: broadening and capable of exploitation in the literary sense. For the wholesale writer, whether of fact or fiction, must go about the world with his eyes wide open, and must have the gift which reads a thrilling mystery into the chance casting down of a scrap of paper. A deep, creamy voice speaks from behind a barred casement; a magnolia flower is thrown into the dust of the common road, a beggar in sorry rags picks it up and presses it to his leprous lips—here is Romance, as I've seen it a thousand different times. Your niggling brain drives you on to wonder what exists behind the barred window—in lands where they leave the doors wide open and guard the windows with entanglements—you wonder, too, what the ragged courtier may really be, and then—behold, a story leaps ready-made into your mind.

There is Romance everywhere, if you only care to look for it!

And Romance, being the salt of life, is necessary to existence. I came across more genuine Romance, as I call Romance, during the war than ever I'd encountered during the piping days of peace. Which naturally brings us to 1914.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE REAL THING

LOOKED at from any vantage-point, the war was a great adventure: Romance in the concrete.

I had studied to equip myself for the Big Show when it came along. I had neglected money-making tasks for the sheer sake of getting ready for the inevitable explosion: sitting for examinations, undergoing courses of instruction with the Regular Army. I had made my bow before His Majesty at St. James's Palace—an ordeal out of the ordinary run—and had secured proof that I was qualified to command in the field. At a mess-dinner at Aldershot, on the evening of the Levee, I discovered that the only officer present—amongst one hundred and fifty, most of them regulars—who possessed the "Q" certificate of competency, was a Territorial. I had seen enough of the Regular Army by this time to know that it had in certain elements deteriorated since the earlier days. One visualized the army as a company of knightly enthusiasts inspired by a fanatical worship of King and Country; one discovered that it was really little else than a business concern, peopled by ambitious youngsters hungering for social position and struggling hard for recognition.

Down there at Aldershot, prior to the war, were many field-days, when purple-faced brigadiers performed miracles with skeleton forces, and discussed the details of mimic battles with their equals in rank in the private lounges of comfortable hotels. The conviction took deep root in my mind that this pre-war preparation was not real, led nowhere. Bitter experience during the bitter years only proved that conviction. Being in the army was a great game: you cast around for promotion, relying usually on feminine influence; and if you danced rather better than the next fellow and so

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could attract the interest of some woman who had a pull with a senior officer, you were safe. If you were merely a plodding soldier, anxious to perfect yourself and your immediate command for the Big Scrap when it came, you were rather sneered at. The commissioned ranks of the prewar army had become flooded with opportunists. Amateur soldiers, such as myself and some few comrades of my own keenness, were simply fair game to be dazzled by windy talk about "The Regular Service."

But—the war came. . . .

I was in Territorial training-camp during the fortnight preceding the ultimatum. This camp was at Whitby, for it was the custom always to arrange the annual trainings at popular pleasure resorts in order to attract recruits—for were they not told that they would enjoy a bracing holiday at Government expense?

The pistol-shot of Serajevo echoed in our camp. We had a feeling that something was about to happen: something bigger than anything ever known in human history. The brass-hats who regulated our soldiering destinies were mysterious.

They laughed at our earnest inquiries. One thing was very certain: in the event of trouble the Territorials would not be required—this was to be a pukka show. But ninety-five per cent. of my immediate command took the foreign service obligation.

I formed the conclusion, prior to the war, that the Territorial Force was not popular with the War Office. As a matter of fact, I know we were not popular. The one ruling idea in the mind of the regular officer before 1914 was—conscription. I have walked down the streets of important cities in company with uniformed regular officers, seen them shouldered by civilians—seen them pause and glare back at the offenders and mutter: "Oh, wait—just wait until conscription comes! Then we'll put you through the mill!"

Personal vanity actuated these pro-conscriptionists. Every captain saw himself a brigadier as soon as the Crown's fighting forces were properly expanded. Every general saw

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himself a field-marshal, for war was the professional soldier's opportunity. Promotion, general advancement, honours and awards: these were what loomed above the horizon that was thickening with war-clouds. I used to tell these regulars that I hoped they had prepared in peace, what time they drew the taxpayers' wages, for war. The average life of the Regular Army officer prior to August the 4th, 1914, was leisurely enough. The well-known *Punch* cartoon of the smart young cavalry officer, who considered that the main use of cavalry in war was to give tone to what must else have been merely a vulgar brawl, was nearer the truth possibly than the inspired artist realized. The Regular Army, notwithstanding that glorified bivouac known as the Boer War, still studied Napoleonic textbooks, and still believed—was it not taught so?—that the elements of war were the brief artillery preparation, the infantry attack, and the spectacular cavalry pursuit.

We eager "civilian helpers" were given to understand that it was no concern of ours if war came. The War Office dedested us—we were merely a sop thrown to satisfy the general run of taxpayers' hankering after safety, in place of conscription with its possibilities of promotion—but when the trouble came the Expeditionary Force would attend to the work. Here was a striking force trained to the last degree, as fit as a world-champion entering the prize-ring, specially equipped and tutored for a campaign in Western Europe, with perfect mobilization plans; and we Territorials would simply step into their places when the call came, hold on to their barracks and sentry-boxes, and generally act as understudies until the Expeditionary Force came triumphantly back.

Certain old-established shibboleths went by the board. The Boer War standards were discovered to be completely inadequate: war was now mentioned as the clashing of almost uncountable millions.

The Sunday prior to the Declaration was a day of electrical tenseness. It was our Territorial custom in the spacious days of peace to utilize the Sunday immediately preceding

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Bank Holiday as a Church Parade. These parades were excellent advertisement for the T.F.; exactly as smart uniforms were good advertising for the regulars.

We, being a mounted unit, entitled to skin-tight overalls and clashing spurs, were already up to full peace strength. Our appearance in column of route in the sunwashed streets of a pleasure resort was always an event. But on this August Sunday there was a psychological element in the air. The men prepared themselves for Church Parade with restrained excitement. They felt, no doubt, as certain of the officers did, that on their neatly-tailored shoulders rested in all probability the continued existence of civilization. You could feel the emotion as they fell into the ranks: the sergeants summoning their squads to have them ready for the sergeant-major, who would have them ready for the company-commander, who would——and so, *ad infinitum*. The Church Parade was ordered for ten o'clock sharp; and the junior N.C.O.'s were falling in their tiny commands somewhere about eight o'clock! But throughout the prolonged proceedings there was that hint of alert eagerness, a suggestion of a threatening danger to be quickly faced and, of course, overcome. As we marched down to church the men locked themselves into their fours and stepped out like precise machines. The thrill of it was magnetic. We had enlisted into our ranks enthusiastic Yorkshiremen: mechanics, textile workers, colliers and the like; and such was their keenness that, as I have said, ninety-five per cent. had taken the foreign service obligation on the whisper of war overseas.

So we took our places in the great church: two thousand men or so, complete with massed bands to augment organ and choir; and the service proceeded. First the massed bands and the organ, by way of voluntary, played "Land of Hope and Glory" and "The King." Then, slowly, solemnly, and you could feel the emotions stir the ranks: "O, God, our help in ages past!" clashed out, and we sang—dear God! how we sang in that splendid moment of patriotic exaltation! We were prepared at that stupendous moment to walk to

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Berlin and pull the Kaiser's impertinent nose, collectively and individually.

The vicar ascended his pulpit, and a wave of emotional enthusiasm swept over the crowded pews. It was an opportunity in a lifetime. These two thousand men awaited a message, as a terrier awaits a thrown stone; they asked for a definite assurance that pending war was a Divine crusade against the powers of darkness. What they wanted was a "Fight the good fight" sermon, no matter how brief, so long as it answered the restless fret within their souls. They wanted to be ordered out to battle with the God of battles in the lead. There was a hiss of indrawn breath, a smack of lips, a creaking of pipeclayed belts as the parson faced us.

He preached a dreary sermon asking for funds to provide the church with a new font-cover. He never so much as mentioned the remotest possibility of war, he only dilated on the need for beautifying the building which was his charge! He missed his chance; and his audience flattened out like stale beer. They shuffled with their feet and coughed, they fidgeted with swords and side-arms, they clashed their spurs. But the prosy, unilluminated sermon dragged on to its bitter end and we were all invited to subscribe to the limit of our means for that font-cover, designs for which, executed by a famous ecclesiastical architect, were on exhibition in the vestry.

He had failed to accept the biggest opportunity of his life! He might have appeared to those two thousand men as another Peter the Hermit, or a Saint Paul; but he had failed, as, in my opinion, his Church failed during the greatest war that history has ever known, that, please God, history may ever know!

We went back to camp, saddened and depressed, the fine enthusiasm dulled, if not altogether quenched. Men who had previously stepped like conquerors now walked like serfs.

The annual Church Parade luncheon followed service. Our mess attired itself in blue undress uniform; local notables were invited guests. But immediately after coffee was served, a waiter handed the C.O. a message. He arose:

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"Considering the gravity of the situation, we should immediately change into service dress," he said. We did. We hurried to our tents and donned khaki; we wondered where we could secure issues of revolver ammunition; we considered our swords and sent our batmen with them to the nearest smithy, pleading the urgency of the moment as excuse for Sabbath work. But it was six months before we set foot in France! None the less the atmosphere of suspense grew. Invasion—a surprise invasion without any definite declaration of war before the first shots were fired—had been our bogy. We knew we were totally unprepared, although occupying a position on the East Coast that was particularly vulnerable. There was not a round of ball cartridge in the stores. The artillery brigade bracketed with us for training had only obsolete guns and no ball ammunition whatever, beyond dummies for practice work. During the remainder of that Sunday the tenseness grew. Perhaps it was only we Territorials who felt it; the civilian element of the town carried on holiday-making unconcernedly—the British sangfroid in face of calamity pending, maybe. Walking to the town's centre, anxious about a consignment of perishable stores, in company with the adjutant, I was jostled by be-flannelled young men and shrill-voiced flappers, who delighted to mistake us for actors from the pleasure-fair.

The adjutant—Regular Army!—gritted his teeth. "Wait—till conscription comes," he said; "and it's coming—fast!" In his Napoleonic mind he already saw those heedless crowds locked to attention at the rasp of his military voice.

During the Sunday night enthusiasts were busy spy-hunting. Houses on the cliffs fronting the bleak North Sea—it had been up to then a wintryish sort of summer, I remember—were open to suspicion. A quickly-drawn window-shade assumed the magnitude of a world-shattering signal. Mysterious flashes were seen stealing out over the night-bound sea. Meantime, infantry detachments were digging trenches according to Field Service Regulations: breast-high protections that were about as much use under modern

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war conditions as so many scratches of a ploughshare.

Monday, Bank Holiday, came. The adjutant went off to Command head-quarters, pledged to send back latest news. A wire arrived addressed personally to myself. I had been of service to the adjutant prior to this annual training.

"Betting five to one against war," he said.

Close on the heels of this prophecy came, not the single code word that we had been taught to expect that meant mobilize according to secret plan; but a tame intimation that T.F. units then in training would return forthwith to their peace depots. We got no reliable news of how matters were progressing. Everything seemed uncertain. Our visions of being launched across the sea like a stone from a sling were dashed to fragments!

It fell to my lot to organize the transfer to depots. This wasn't easy; for the usual Bank Holiday traffic was running: trippers were pouring into the place in legions. The war-alarm left the holiday-makers unconcerned; we felt bitterly towards them. Flannelled fools at the wicket, with a vengeance! They protested when we commandeered certain trains that were earmarked for trippers for the transport of men who might, within counted hours, be facing hostile musketry. They called our attitude military tyranny, Prussianism. Maybe we were a bit too enthusiastic, even to the extent of arresting railway officials and placing them under armed guard in their own offices; but we felt the position was precarious. Anyhow, we obeyed orders: confiscating the trains and moving the troops. A few of us were instructed to remain behind and clear up the inevitable mess, settle all accounts and generally mop up the fragments. There was an exhilarating carnival in the town on the Tuesday night; but there was also a growing tautness in the atmosphere. Strain and forcedness sounded in the laughter everywhere.

Eleven o'clock arrived. The newspapers had declared the ultimatum to expire at eleven o'clock. No word came—it was war!

Our straining ears already seemed to hear the thunder of

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the Navy's guns as they stood-off the first rush of the Teuton invasion.

At breakfast the following morning, in an hotel on the cliffs, we saw, my subaltern and myself, a line of black destroyers snake into the bay. They were steaming all-out stripped to the buff.

"Those beggars have the war-heads on their torpedoes now," I told my sub. "It's war!"

So it had really come: the event concerning which we'd preached, in readiness for which we'd zealously prepared. War!

It hardly created a bigger flutter locally than the winning or losing of a selling plater race at a local meeting!

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CHAPTER XIX

A WAR ON

We Civilian Helpers—I persist in the use of the epithet, as the Regular Army persisted throughout the war—heard surprisingly little of events. Probably we were too busy. There was very much to do; for we, being a departmental corps, were required, immediately on mobilization, to perform duties abandoned by the Expeditionary Force. We were to train ourselves; but we were also to perform necessary works, and get ready to go abroad, if the war didn't end too soon. In the early days we feared the whole show might be over before we so much as smelt powder. Three months' hostilities was the limit, according to the wiseacres. National finances couldn't stand the colossal strain; anyhow, Belgium was putting up a gallant show to the Hunnish invasion, and our own incomparable Expeditionary Force was already moving secretly overseas. It would be a bad look-out for Fritz when he butted up against our perfect little Army. The Expeditionary Force was mobilized; the plans had worked without a hitch; it would form itself into an irresistible wedge—the Navy guarding its exposed flank—and drive forward with the velocity of a shell to Berlin, where it would seize the Kaiser and hold him to ransom. We were terribly afraid the war might be over before we Territorials got our chance. So, being moved to our war-stations, we set to work to train with added keenness, hoping that we might be complimented for our zeal to the extent of being sent forthwith across the Straits, to share the Regulars' glories.

In my branch of work I found myself up against a stolid phlegm that can hardly be described. War might be the professional soldier's opportunity, but, judged by the evidences, it appeared also to be his holiday: at least for such

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as were not actually bracketed with the Expeditionary Force: the highly-trained antiques of the General Staff. Our natural enthusiasm was subject to sudden quenchings, thinly veiled sneers about ambition over-reaching itself and quarrelling with our ways. For some of us, having been trained in business life, desired the war, now that it was on us, to be handled in business-like fashion. The Old Army was anything but business-like. It knew how to keep meticulous record of every chipped flint removed from a Brown Bess musket during the Peninsular War. Its organization, in theory, was perfection. It was keen—too keen to be remembered, perhaps, now that the war years are half-forgotten things—on formal ceremonial. Battalions, brigades and divisions might be mowed down in swathes, but a junior officer must not fail to salute a field-officer no matter in what circumstances he met him. You might arm your coast defence troops with obsolete Creusot guns lent by the French—relics of the Franco-German War—and issue new troops in training dummy rifles, even walking sticks, but you must not forget the hoary traditions of Army mess-rooms.

In the first days of mobilization I found the cordially detested Red Caps, the Military Police, infinitely more in evidence than instructors in soldiering. There was more joy over one inebriate rounded up before the local A.P.M. than over a thousand eager volunteers for enlistment. The old soulless discipline persisted, though an entirely new material was coming forward to serve. One heard the Red Caps were promised rewards and promotion according to the number of cases they brought; and naturally they ran in the least quarrelsome of the new material, who had never been accustomed to that soulkilling, individuality-destroying discipline which counted the serving soldier as a mere something to be hurled into action unthinkingly for the glorification of his commanders.

The new hands took some time to settle down; the old hands went no part of the way to meet them—then. The story was current amongst us enthusiasts that flint and steel and

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even bows and arrows were standards on which the Army was based. As for the Navy—we knew nothing about it. It was hidden in the North Sea mists: but we thanked God we had a Navy, because to our minds it stood for efficiency.

Yes, there were bitternesses. We wanted to serve, and we were pestered with irritating, trifling regulations. As a case in point:

I was ordered on mobilization to proceed to the war station, and there establish a supply depot for eighteen thousand men and five thousand horses: a complete Division with staff, as laid down in Mobilization Orders. A three days' reserve of supplies would be collected and arrangements made for a steady daily flow for an indefinite period. Nothing was to be expected from War Office sources.

The adjutant had been nicked away from us, being hurried to a better appointment that meant more than the additional daily half-crown allotted to Regular officers who served as adjutants to Territorial units. We were on our own. We tried to do the best we could: primarily for the troops and horses, secondly, for the country. We were zealous: I swear to that.

Economical contracts seemed advisable. Certain such were made, certain others required consideration. Already the Business-as-Usual instinct was inspiring certain of the community. On August the 5th, 1914, I invited all the forage contractors of the town to attend at the police court and make offers for the supply of forage required. They came swiftly, because we had sent out the police force to round them up. They passed into the presence. We were curt and summary in those early days, before we'd learnt to wait.

"Can you supply so many tons of good clover hay tomorrow without fail, and so many tons daily for an indefinite period?" was the question asked.

"Yes."

"Good! Price?" In seventy-five per cent. of cases the prices asked were from fifty to a hundred per cent. more than

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had been charged four days previously. Here were the second rank of the profiteers, who saw fortune in Britain's misfortune. The first rank had already besieged the War Office for appointments and promotions, or laid court to women of influence—and many fair fingers pulled key-strings during those early days, as the world has since learnt—to entreat them to secure opulent "cushy" jobs that meant a maximum of pay and honour and a minimum of danger.

There came to my office one worthy man with patriotism exuding from every pore. He was the more welcome in that he immediately followed a sallow individual who had brazenly said that he was in a position to corner the entire forage supply of the neighbourhood, if his terms were not accepted. Although only in a small way of business, he could supply our needs, at a price that was economically sound. He was nervous and jumpy and yet likeable: keen as a terrier on doing his bit, although too old to enlist. He explained, quite simply, that it was his desire to help according to his lights, with no eye on his own advancement. His tender was accepted. He made a condition of prompt payment, as he was a small man who had never built up a large credit. This was promptly agreed to, since I was deputed by the War Office to act in the best interests of the State. I did not know—I did not know!

At the end of a week, during which faultless supplies had been provided exactly on time, my contractor presented himself with an account. It was checked and found to be correct to a halfpenny. Such units as had received supplies spoke glowingly of their quality: good clover hay and honest oats had turned up with precision. Good!

"This bill will be forwarded to the Command paymaster and earmarked for immediate payment," he was told. He had probably made a bare three per cent. profit on his transactions. His clerk told me that he had fought and broken the ring of profiteers intent on breaking him.

His account was endorsed in red ink, bound with official

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red tape, dispatched to Command head-quarters, with request for immediate payment: the circumstances being explained in detail. Nothing happened.

A pressing letter urging early payment was ignored. Days went by. The contractor's bank manager was pressing for security or a definite cancelling of his overdraft. I proceeded by car to the Paymaster's office, saw a venerable pundit, who had not yet found time to change from mufti into uniform, who bleated like any bogged sheep on how things had happened in his pre-Waterloo youth and invited me to drink excellent port laid down about the time of Moore's retreat from Corunna. He said that the contractor's account for forage would be put through in the usual way, either during the present quarter or the following. One didn't rush things in the Service; and would I stay to dinner? There was quite a good show on at the theatre, and he might be able to get seats. It was beautiful: one expected to hear a harpsichord playing sedate pavanes and toccatos in an adjoining room; at any moment, I fancied, some delightful old Watteau-like lady in hoops and powder would poke her head round the door and remind my senior that his sedan chair was in waiting to convey him to the Regent's rout.

I said I wanted a negotiable cheque to give to my contractor that night, in order to save him from an hysterical breakdown.

"Oh, we mustn't hurry these things," I was told.

"There's a war on," I mentioned.

"That reminds me of the first Sudan campaign." He was further reminded of ancient battles, ambuscades, outfalls and sorties, and in the intervals of cursing his gout he detailed his service. I swear I could smell the stench of Greek fire and quicklime in every sentence. He meandered on like a placid river that had flowed untroubled by floods or freshets for centuries and that anticipated no turmoil during the next two or three eons.

"And now, sir; what about that cheque?" I asked when the stream ran dry.

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"Let him wait; teach him a thing or two, eh? Teach some of these civilians what war means," was all I could get out of him. I returned to my base and told the contractor that a cheque would soon be forthcoming. Two days later I personally interviewed his bank-manager: a tyrant in miniature, as managers of small branches are sometimes apt to be. I stated that Mr. —— had secured a valuable War Office contract, quoting figures in proof; and that as such he was entitled to consideration. The financial autocrat smilingly agreed to my face, and promptly put the screw on his client. My contractor sat in my office and wept over the non-arrival of that Army draft. Meanwhile he continued to supply irreproachable forage. The position becoming desperate I again interviewed my veteran of the early Punic Wars, and stated, as intelligently as possible, in words of one syllable, that unless definite action were taken it would be necessary to take the affair to the War Office, where, I hinted, I had influence.

In the long run a cheque was forthcoming, though only under protest; but it satisfied me. It was for many thousands of pounds. I took it in person to the contractor's office, and was told that he had that afternoon been placed under restraint in an institution for the mentally defective. He presently died, a hopeless lunatic, a victim of Regular Army moth-eaten dilatoriness; and yet, at a later date, reviewing some old-established garrison contracts in force at one station, I discovered a system of wholesale swindling that had cost the Government hundreds of thousands of pounds.

When I compiled a dossier dealing with that matter, with proof of every crooked deal, and presented it to superior authority, it was torn across and across and pitched into a waste-paper basket with the remark: "This isn't a time to wash dirty linen; there's a war on!"

The outstanding fact of the whole of the war, so far as a varied experience proved to me, was the utter and colossal and tragic failure of the ruling caste, so-called!

For instance: one section of the division being hurriedly moved towards the coast on threat of immediate invasion, a

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relief-depot was needed to supply outlying brigades. One place was half suitable: the goods shed of a railway station, overrun with rats and prone to be flooded when the autumn rains came. Suggestions that a temporary shed should be erected to protect several thousand pounds' worth of Government stores of a perishable kind were forwarded through the usual channels. Oh, my God, those stagnant, tortuous usual channels! It was suggested that as I had in my command many tradesmen capable of performing the work, the raw material might be bought and the covering erected on economical lines. Prices were worked out and submitted: one was for a suitable shed built by Army labour; the other for a similar shed put up by contractors. The difference in price was as 2 to 9, I think. Minute Nineteen came back to me, always through the usual channels, asking why a shed was necessary. Nineteen separate minutes are not added in a breath: considerable time had elapsed.

I explained patiently that with autumn coming on and the river rising it was as well to make preparation, especially as many more troops and horses were expected in the area. I also mentioned that I believed it possible to buy second-hand timber at an economical price, so that, with my own immediate labour available, the cost of erection was negligible.

Minute 48 asked for a discussed comparison between the two prices. It also mentioned that in the opinion of the Chief Engineer in charge of Barracks, no such shed was requisite, as the troops were now serving under active service conditions. It was portentously assumed that the officer responsible for the initial suggestion had not yet recognized that a war was in progress.

I replied to the effect that, whilst aware a war was going on, I had now thirty-five thousand men and ten thousand horses to feed, that, when these units were sent abroad, others and larger units would probably take their places, that the shed was an urgent necessity since the autumn rains were already on, and it had been found necessary to write off much valuable provender, destroyed by wet and exposure.

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Minute 88 was formidable, breathing threats of punishment for levity and irrelevancy, and also asking for a copy of the two original estimates, lost. Copies of my original minute were forwarded. Minute 109 asked for the qualifications and names of the tradesmen mentioned as available for the erection of the shed, and were they being fully employed? There were many "Passed to you, please, for report" incidentals that, though numbered, were hardly minutes. As for the impressions of rubberstamps: a new industry must have been created.

But virtue had its reward. Minute 143 authorized the erection of a shed by contract, at the higher price: the erection to conform to War Office standard for permanent barracks.

Minute 144 went back, stating that as the Division in question had been in France for four months there seemed no reason why the officer originating the correspondence should concern himself with the matter further.

Needless to say, we had stolen the timber and built the shed within three days of the creation of Minute One.

Meantime, men died freely on Flanders fields.

Meantime, too, newly-recruited men, Kitchener's Army, were drilled and shaped and dispatched to France to fight the good fight, and die in swaths, as their commanders gained slow experience in modern war conditions, whilst we Territorials, trained to a hair, were left to bite our nails in comparative idleness. Kitchener, we were told, disliked the Territorials. He held the Regular Army idea that the T.F. had interfered with the idea of conscription before the war. We were the outcasts of the Imperial Forces. Eager volunteers from the Colonies, in no wise trained in the arts of war, were hurled into the maelstrom, where they died or were mangled beyond recognition. We Territorials did garrison work at home. The whole thing was unfair: that was the opinion expressed in 1914; the opinion adhered to to-day. The best part of fourteen divisions of highly trained men, inflamed in initial stages by sheer genuine patriotism, were

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held back whilst unformed men, commanded by unformed officers, were thrown into the chasm of active service abroad. We of the T.F.: "Dog-shooters," "Saturday Afternoon Soldiers"—though the new-comers hadn't even sacrificed their Saturday afternoons in readiness for the Big Parade—began to think we'd honestly earned our nicknames.

T.F. Divisional Commanders went personally to the War Office, and urged their individual claims on the High Command. They swore, tears in their eyes, that their divisions were fit to go anywhere and do anything: fitter than the Guards. They were either placated with smooth, slow words, or were transferred—being serving soldiers—to so-called Regular divisions of raw recruits hastily licked into shape to replace the perished Expeditionary Force. All we of humbler rank could do was carry on.

The months dragged wearily by. We were allowed to know nothing officially of what transpired across the Straits, but very infrequently some officer on leave from the war-zone would drift within our ken and talk without restraint. We knew things weren't going well; that we were already licked on points. We knew that the Russian steam-roller was a myth, and that the Russian troops, secretly landed in North Scotland and run to Folkestone, were phantoms. And yet the station master of a junction in Yorkshire informed me, by the memory of Stephenson himself, that he had seen the Russians with his own eyes, seen the snow from their boots swept from the compartments!

We T.F. men were growing stale and disillusioned. Of what avail our so-called patriotism of the peaceful years wherein we had used up valuable leisure in quest of competence, if parvenus, fellows who'd wasted their time in enjoyment whilst we were toiling and moiling, were shoved over our heads, drafted out to France, and given every opportunity for service abroad? The new fellows got the cheers and commendations; we got the thick end of the stick to hold! It didn't seem worth while. A terrible boredom grew amongst the rank and file, who had really little to do save

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eat the active service ration, and perform more or less desultory training, and loaf about fried-fish shops. They were reported on as being fit to serve anywhere, hard as nails. But the ponderous immobility of the cobwebbed War Office held us idle. We were required to content ourselves—men, as finely trained by this time, I assert, as the men of the original Expeditionary Force—with going through the motions of active service and reading in the daily papers the authorized version of an Eye-witness, who filled a column with a picturesque description of an A.S.C. driver blacking his boots and making his morning toilet, and gave us nothing to bite on. We decided that the censorship was not established in order to keep the enemy from gaining information so much as to prevent our own countrymen from learning the grave and gross errors that were hourly being made.

We read the plausible lies about the *Audacious*. We were assured that she had not been sunk; that she never could be sunk; and we had as a guest in our mess a youngster who was actually a midshipman aboard the scuppered battleship when she went down! Lies everywhere and evasions, and the soul growing sick within!

When the official pronouncements swore that the *Audacious* was still in commission as an efficient fighting unit I had, pinned on the wall of my billet-room, a reproduction of an actual photograph, sent me by a journalistic friend, cut from an American magazine, showing the battleship awash and the *Olympic* standing by to save life!

There was something wrong somewhere. At all events, I was growingly aware that any non-commissioned clerk could do the work I was doing; and so, as the Navy still appealed strongly as a symbol of fighting efficiency, I sent in an application through the usual channels, for transfer to the Royal Naval Air Service. I had experimented with flying in the early days of 1914, before even the first whisper of war sounded; buying my time in the air with Monte Carlo winnings. Also, I knew a man who stayed at the same hotel as myself in town, and this man was *persona grata* with a high

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official at the Admiralty. Introductions were secured. I was invited to Whitehall, met the high official. I'd been a sailor, was a soldier—the identical material for the R.N.A.S.

"We'll put you with Porte," I was told. "Either Porte or Samson. Come this way."

I was conducted, a simple T.F. captain, into that room over the Admiralty arch where the selection committee sat. My acquaintance was a very high official indeed on the civil side. I was marched past a waiting queue of high-rank officers, R.N., R.M. and Army.

"This is Captain Shaw; give him a commission. Allot him either to Porte or Samson," the chairman of the committee was told.

"Very good, sir—and his transfer?"

"That can be arranged from the Army end." It was done. Five minutes had sufficed. The Navy was a modern, efficient service, that got things done whilst the Army was still deploring the abolition of chain mail!

"You'll hear of your transfer in a few days," my sponsor said. "A damned shame they kept you frousting at home defence when you might have been actively employed all this time!"

I returned jubilantly to my ration-supplying. Here was a full-sized man's job offering: the Naval Air Service! I had trepidations, to be sure: I was a bit on the elderly side for a service whose characteristic note was its youthfulness; I might fail when it came to the test. But it was worth trying: and here was opportunity to get a fresh angle on the war—from the air. Soldiering was an incident; I was still a writer, and the feeling troubling me was that if I won as varied an experience as was humanly possible, since I had to see the war through, valuable writing material would amass for the benefit of posterity.

I had plenty of time to think these things over, however, for the Army was in no haste to consider my transfer. On the evening the authorization arrived the West Riding Division was ordered to proceed to France for service—on lines of

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communication, we were told—within forty-eight hours. They told me that I was now indispensable: the whole scale of values was shifting.

"You'll be all right, though," said my C.O. "All that's necessary is for you to see your company across to France, and help the division here and there; and then you can come back and join your precious Air Service."

I jibbed, I protested; but—there was nothing to be done, save obey.

It was a hurry and a rush to get the various units ready for the war-zone. The entire division had to be re-equipped with new guns, new clothes, boots, rifles, and everything else. The overworked Ordnance Department seemed disposed to panic. I spent twenty-eight consecutive hours at the Ordnance Officer's elbow, scrounging details from him. Every senior officer applied promptly for pre-embarkation leave—they'd learnt so much from the Regulars, anyhow!—and my shoulders were enlisted to carry extra loads. But, with the units equipped—Lord! what a fretful nightmare it all was! there showed a sporting chance of ten hours' leave for me. I filled out a duty warrant for myself and made haste to say the necessary adieux. Divisional orders said that a free warrant was permissible for such as were earmarked for duty overseas. Three years later I was required to pay to War Office funds the price of that railway ticket—one pound odd. I replied that at the time of the warrant's issue D.O.'s authorized it. I was told that at that present time D.O.'s did not authorize free warrants for pre-embarkation leave. I replied that in three years many changes are apt to take place, and forwarded a copy of the order in question. The authorities deducted the worth of the ticket from my next instalment of pay! Yet, certain contracts entered into at the outbreak of war had saved the funds hundreds of thousands of pounds. I cannot understand War Office finance, and I never shall!

We went to France: travelling secretly and stealthily. No cheers sped us on our warward way. We literally slunk away from York Station in the bitter darkness of a winter

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morning, and ambled round about England at large for many tedious hours, until we were decanted at Southampton, to be kept there as virtual prisoners until the overseas transport was ready for us. The Romance of War seemed about as vivid as discarded khaki.

The last order I received prior to entraining was that no old boots must be taken abroad by the rank and file—every pair must be split new. I had disturbing visions of my cherished lads marching, marching over the pitiless French *pavé* in harsh, unadapted footwear as resilient as an armour plate. We had listened to survivors of the Mons retreat who had walked their boot-soles into the soles of their feet. Boots must be comfortable to ensure efficiency. I informed my own command that two new pairs of boots would be issued to each man, and that there would be no kit inspection immediately preceding the departure. They paraded in creaking new boots, which made them limp, and passed inspection; then they naturally changed into easy, part-worn boots as soon as opportunity offered; and as a result not one man of the detachment fell out from lameness during the tedious marches in France. I claim no credit—I pass it on to Mr. Rudyard Kipling, whose Soldier Stories should be used as common-sense textbooks by the military authorities; and I doubt if the War Office could do better than appoint Mulvaney Common-sense Officer in Chief to all departments. Mulvaney advised grease in the socks rather than on the hair! Officially, my company acted on War Office rulings; actually, we modelled ourselves on Kipling's pattern.

We sailed in pitch darkness from Southampton, passing through the swept channel: at the harbour entrance a destroyer collected us and ordered all lights out. Instructions were that armed parties should stand-to throughout the passage, with loaded rifles, to deal with submarine attacks. Rifles *versus* torpedoes! But orders are orders: so, throughout the night, guards were posted along the rails. Most of them were very sea-sick, and seemed as if they rather hoped a torpedo might put a period to their discomforts.

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It was good to be back on deep water again: and, finding friends amongst the company, I spent the entire passage on the navigating bridge, where I heard interesting details of my precious merchant service's war-work. Ships outward, filled with troops and munitions, were entitled to a destroyer escort. Homeward, empty, no escort was available. The ship and her people counted for nothing; they were merely conveyances to carry the fighting units to the war-zone. But the Channel was as bitter a battle-field as any spot in Flanders, when all's said and done.

It struck me, peering overside, marking the phosphorescent wake that seemed to shine like a searchlight's ray and the smother of white paper piled about forefoot and tumblehome, what a magnificent target this ten-knot transport, complete with three thousand men and equipment for an artillery brigade, guns included, offered to an enterprising submarine. I pictured the whole attack: the stealthy thing driving its torpedo home into our vitals, whilst the escorting destroyer zigzagged energetically a good two sea-miles ahead. I had given attention to this matter of submarine warfare in fiction stories. Had I been commander of a submarine, I thought, I could have sunk the loaded transport with ease, and got clear away before the escort realized that anything out of ordinary had taken place. I listened to amazing stories of things that had happened to the merchant service.

One of the officers had been watch-keeper aboard a certain British steamer a month before, proceeding without escort. She was unarmed, for the fact was stressed that the Red Ensign floated over a peaceful service: merchantmen were not combatants. The Navy would shepherd and protect them on their lawful occasions.

In ordinary times before the war we used to be jealous of the Royal Navy; we said that a service with a special Saturday night toast of its own—"Sweethearts and wives, and may they never meet!"—seldom went to sea over the week-end, preferring to put in its time moored to the comfort of a dock-wall. We held that any merchant ship making for sea in hard

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weather was sure to meet many warships hastening for shelter. In the merchant service we were always at war with a crafty, pitiless enemy; there was no peace. But, officially, merchant craft were rated as non-combatants.

This ship I speak of, carrying a peaceful cargo—no munitions, no troops—was held up by a U-boat in a zone that was held to be our Royal Navy's particular preserve. She was brought-to with a shot across the bows, and stopped. The U-boat, on the surface, came to within hailing distance.

"Abandon ship at once!" was the order. The ship was abandoned: the life-boats being hastily watered, provisioned and lowered. This was November month, bad weather in northern latitudes. The U-boat placed bombs in the steamer and sank her out of hand, then ordered the life-boats alongside. Questions were asked. Then the boats were bilged, so that they leaked hard, rendering baling constantly necessary; the fresh-water kegs were emptied overboard, the poor stock of biscuit—their only provision—was dipped into salt water, and the boats were turned adrift, four hundred miles from land, with half a gale blowing. It was very cold. Three men survived, my informant being one. The other two were hopelessly insane. So much for non-combatant status!

German non-combatants were better treated than that. When the British coast-towns were bombarded in December, 1914, every German resident received secret information beforehand that enabled him to leave the threatened zones in time.

Without disaster our transport reached Havre—the official war area.

Leisurely peace characterized the port, I thought. But—here was a thrill!—German prisoners were unloading the numerous transports: Prussian Guardsmen—big, upstanding fellows, who took imprisonment surlily. These were the first of the enemy we had seen at close quarters. They scowled at us: you could see they thought mighty little of us. Our men, in characteristic British fashion, threw them packets of gaspers, which the Guardsmen accepted with alacrity for all their

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high mien. But, seeing these men—the fine flower of the European armies, the ruthless Huns of the propagandist statements—employed on menial tasks for us, gave us thrilling premonitions of ultimate victory. These were the men, or their brothers, who had spread curtains of women and children between them and honest bullets as they swept on to victory. These had fought in Hazebrouck's market-place; they had violated French virgins in public by way of driving home the lesson of frightfulness. Whilst we pitied their captivity, we detested their mentality; and some of our honest Yorkshiremen seemed disposed to get off their tunics and set about a few of the prisoners—bare fists and no favours shown!

But there was no time for national animosities there; opportunity would come later. We were marched to the railway station, to wait aimlessly for hour after dismal hour, whilst officialdom, annoyed at our advent seemingly, found out what was to be done with us. We disturbed, by our arrival, the even tenor of existence at the base. As semi-trained Territorials, we were told, we should be given a comprehensive six months' grounding on lines of communication, prior to passing muster as fit for the firing line. Superb British Guardsmen, polished to brilliancy—red-capped M.P.'s for the most part—and gorgeous Staff officers, already plentifully decorated with foreign ribbons, eyed us tolerantly. There was a snap and smartness about these Base details that impressed us. These were real soldiers! Let any man so much as loosen a button of his tunic and an eagle-eyed Brass Hat or Red Cap was on his track like a thousand of bricks.

"We rather pride ourselves on our smartness in saluting down here," said the Staff Officer of high rank who had been our adjutant a month or two before, and who never, to my certain knowledge, heard a hostile shot fired during the entire war, as a pair of Guards sentries presented arms with thrilling efficiency, their every muscle vibrant with zeal.

"It's a fine thing—saluting," said I. I wanted to say more, but thought it better not.

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"You always were a bit of a cynic, Shaw, weren't you? Come along and see some of the work we're doing down here; you've no idea of the troubles we have." But so far as I could see, and I looked pretty closely, the Base seldom, if ever, muddied its boots, and never, under any circumstances, neglected to use the buttonstick. The pipeclay régime was unaltered. War was an episode, not an event. But it seemed to me that a few hundreds of these spick-and-span Base details, prime fighting men, might have been spared from purely ornamental duties to bolster up an ever-thinning line to which were being drafted many thousands of purely amateur soldiers who had merely obeyed a patriotic impulse. Some time later—a year or more—I spent a week at Havre, and found things exactly the same—stout fighting troops playing toy-soldiers, amateurs surveying them with awe as they moved to the trenches and death.

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CHAPTER XX

FLANDERS FIELDS

We were not drafted along the lines of communication. We were packed into French troop-trains—40 hommes, 8 chevaux—and sent crawling out into the blue of the vague unknown. We weren't told whither we fared; but the O.C. train was told that we must disembark at some village that wasn't easily found on the map. Being soldiers, we'd no notion of where our actual battle-line was: the censorship was affording much placid work to ambitious officers. But after a three days' journey, up and down the whole of France, uncomfortable, haphazard and indifferently fed, we detrained within easy march of Armentières, and footed it to Neuf Berquin, where our Division Head-quarters were established. We were attached, it appeared, to the Indian Corps for training, discipline and rations. On our march we were attacked, not by the enemy, but by clamorous French urchins, who craved biscuits, buttons, badges—anything that had a concrete value. That ignoble profiteering spirit, which so terribly characterized certain of the Flanders peasants, was already much in evidence. When orders were issued that no food must be gifted to these rapacious birds of prey, we, in our innocence, deemed it shameful. Here was starving France, her soil trodden into bloody mud by merciless feet, and her very children denied the crumbs from our richly-laden tables. However, for once officialdom was right: quite a thriving and profitable trade existed in certain areas in supplies cadged from British troops. As for the bare-faced robberies in the estaminets and tawdry stores—ugh!

Immediately on concentration the division was drafted, not into practice trenches but into the real thing, taking over the line from Armentières to La Bassée. France had de-

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manded some concrete help as well as promises: the line was sparsely held and the wastage was enormous; consequently the T.F. was hurried from England to plaster up the wider gaps.

"And now," said I, "I'll be allowed to go to the Naval Air Service and do some fighting!" I admit that I was blood-thirstily inclined. Remembering what I had seen and heard, I was anxious to do something personal by way of vengeance on these insensate spoilers of Europe.

But the transfer didn't come through. In the field, home orders had no weight. After tedious waiting I ventured to forward again my plea for transfer. This officer, I was courteously told, could not be spared. Gratifying, but unsatisfactory! The Battle of Fromelles was fought: a battle on an unprecedented scale, with a full four-hours' preliminary bombardment prior to the infantry attack, and the cavalry brought up to pursue the fleeing foe. General French himself oversaw operations from a near-by church tower. Nothing happened of moment, except that a few German prisoners came back; and the noise of the bombardment was great; but we heard that we had lost twenty thousand men, held up by enemy barbed wire, shot down in swathes. Neuve Chapelle was fought: officially it was a victory, actually it was nothing of the sort. More German prisoners came back; but many more of our ambulances came bumping and skidding along the infamous *pavé* roads pitted with gaping shell-holes.

Others have written about these phases of the war. The mud, the rain, the grime, the hopeless monotony of it all; the dogged patience of the troops who were at last learning that nine-tenths of war consists of bored loafing; who were learning that there was a reason in their training which tried to teach them to loaf without being bored—these stand out vividly in memory to-day. There was nothing glorious or spectacular; there was no movement, just an eternity of revolting conditions. Battalions took their tours of duty in the trenches about Fleurbaix, endured the driving rain and the eternal mud, came out for rest, so-called; to be wept over

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by their superiors because of their excessive dirtiness; they spent a week in cleaning and polishing themselves and in practising the art of saluting; then they returned morbidly to the tunnels, girding at the appalling monotony. War was a muddy, messy affair. It was only at the bases that it was picturesque and spectacular.

My unit had its first casualty at Fleurbaix: a decent lad of mine, chosen for his very decency to serve as groom to Brigade H.Q., went to tend his horses under heavy shell-fire, afraid lest they might miss him; a shell burst and wounded him; gangrene supervened and he died. I was able to be with him as he passed across. He seemed glad to be clear of the mud and cold and disillusionment.

Depression was everywhere; the opinion was that the war would never end. We needn't have fretted; we were in plenty of time to have a look-in!

An armoured train that patrolled between Armentières and Béthune, a Naval unit, commanded by a man of parts, attracted me. It carried two four-inch guns. It was permitted to fire as many as three rounds per gun per day, but only in order to engage enemy active batteries. There was a parlous shortage of munitions, whilst the politicians at home were barefacedly giving the lie to the rumours! The battalions of my own division were supplied with two machine-guns apiece; each front-line battalion borrowed the machine-guns of its supporting battalion and established all four in the parapets. If their positions had been attacked and carried there was not a single other machine-gun between the enemy and the coast. There were no bombs, although experiments were being conducted with jam-tins filled with cordite and scrap. A favourite trick with us was to char the end of a piece of instantaneous fuse, to give the impression of a slow fuse lit and extinguished; insert it in a jam-tin grenade, and heave the unlighted missile across to the enemy trenches—here some fifty feet or less distant. Fritz was encouraged to hoist us with our own petards; seeing an unexploded bomb

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fall at his feet, he naturally lit it to hurl back—but the instantaneous fuse didn't wait and the jam-tin occasionally blew Fritz to bits.

There were spy-hunts. Men were dying mysteriously in the trenches, obviously shot from behind. I remember an early-morning search some of us loafers made, and the discovery of a Flanders farmer ploughing in the rear of the trench-line: a courageous man determined to continue despite the war. The papers at home eulogized his kind. But a rifle was clipped to the plough-stilt, too; so he was summarily shot.

There was also a windmill whose sails twitched mysteriously whenever an enemy bombardment commenced. The miller was arrested, but he protested his innocence. He had several sons serving with the French army; he was above suspicion. But the enemy shell-fire was infinitely more accurate when that windmill was in action, I noticed.

The dreary winter passed, the dreary spring commenced, and still no word of my transfer to an aggressive force appeared. There was nothing to do save pursue the terrible, monotonous round of duties, which any clerk could have performed. Impatience grew almost to a fever. England, we fretted, ought to have mobilized all her powers on an intelligent scale: qualified men should be given positions where they could work all-out to the extent of their abilities for the common weal. Instead England persisted in thrusting square pegs into round holes. Green sickness descended upon us. This condition might persist for ever. The first seven years were to be the worst, the back-of-the-trench rumours said; after that, each seventh year was to mark an access of beastliness. No one seemed anxious to do anything—lethargy seemed to grow. It was necessary to wait and see—wait and see—until all civilization mobilized itself in readiness for some vague, colossal military movement that was to sweep the enemy out of his trenches and lift him in panic flight as far as Berlin, without pausing for breath *en route*. Meanwhile, the daily wastage of human life was incredible. So were the egregious

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errors made everywhere. Orders were that when a battery of field artillery went into position, its horses should be picketed not less than a mile from the guns. But a mile distant found other positioned guns! The horses were stabled alongside the other battery's field-pieces, and officialdom was satisfied!

We were ordered to provide efficient stabling for our own horses. We were told that local resources would be utilized, as no War Office stores were available. A footnote to the order stated that on no account whatsoever must a local stick or stone be employed. We had to build our stables out of thin air and mud, to all seeming. As it was, we built them of bricks from shelled houses, of ration boxes filled with clay, and contrived, in the way of British armies, to achieve the totally impossible.

Leisurely ineptitude appeared as the key-note of everything everywhere. The early flush of patriotism died; what was the good of trying? Other people, younger than oneself, with fewer responsibilities, were funking it at home. Out in Flanders—well, why not do as everyone else was doing: scrounge around for promotion, decorations and fat, cushy jobs? Pull all the strings you jolly well could and get a surcease from mud and rain and flies and pestilence!

But the division was removed in attachment to another corps: once again the appeal for transfer to the R.N.A.S. went in—to be summarily rejected. Again this officer, who was finding it difficult to retain his reason through very boredom, was too valuable to be spared. My batman felt the boredom too. He was everlastingly applying to me for leave from our immediate area: when he got it he tramped sturdily away, rifle slung, down a swimming road into the bleak landscape. Once I asked him where he went and why. He spent his leisure, it seemed, in marching to the fire trenches and indulging in casual sniping. He already had seven notches on his rifle-stock.

Trifling details, tragic, poignant, humorous, might be recounted endlessly. A shell-burst in a Béthune street say, amongst a crowd of laughing soldiers and shrill-voiced French

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girls—and the messy shambles that resulted had better be left to the imagination. A Yorkshire collier lad trying to bargain with a Frenchwoman over the price of eggs—countless vignettes remain in memory.

Desultory bombardments were more or less constant: the Germans lobbed shell on cross-roads and other targets with such exact timing that we knew they would not deviate by a second from the schedule. If a German artillery unit were ordered to search a road at the rate of ten rounds per hour, we knew that punctually every six minutes a shell would burst in that road, and we took steps to get our men and transport through the danger zone in the quiet intervals.

The war hardly seemed serious in those early days when the High Command was recasting its impressions and endeavouring to learn a new art imposed by the advance of science as applied to war. One listened to French peasants—those who remained in the danger-zone for purpose of profit, and much profit they made out of our men, who never seemed able to satisfy their appetites, though the army marching ration was ludicrously large for inactive soldiers—as they phlegmatically told of the German occupation. Sad-faced girls wandered, seemingly aimless, along the *pavé:* they were pointed out as victims of a licentious soldiery. Certain of these destroyed themselves, unable to face the impending shame of maternity. We were told of the city fathers of La Gorgue, shot down in cold blood, because certain shotguns had been discharged at the entering enemy.

An elderly lady keeping a small lace-shop in St. Omer had a tale to tell. Her husband had been killed in the war of 1870, as a *franc-tireur;* he had left her with three infant sons —one posthumous. These, attaining manhood, married and begot sons in their turn. All three sons were killed in the present war; five grandsons were already dead, two granddaughters had been violated. She herself, practically alone, had been compelled to evacuate her villa near Lille, saving nothing; but having a knowledge of lace-making she worked hard and vended her wares as best she might.

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She was lonely, with no hope for present or future. "C'est triste, la guerre!" she mentioned; not rancorously, but merely philosophically. War seemed a beastly, unnecessary business. I saw a Flanders farm-wench, seemingly half-witted, slatternly, fashion a rude cross out of two wheel spokes, with bleeding hands, and trudge away with the emblem to place it on the grave of some English soldier who had spoken kindly to her before he was dismembered by a shell. At the roadsides were little mounds with bayonets protruding, perhaps a *képi* on the locking-ring—French soldiers' graves one and all!

I know that, for my own part, I, who had looked on war, as was the then custom amongst young British manhood, as the final court of appeal, grew sick of the insensate folly of war. The sheer dirt, beastliness and futility of what I was witnessing entirely changed my viewpoint. War was a fool's game. It created nothing; it merely destroyed, material things and spiritual things alike. It was a politicians' business from end to end: they, the pundits, pulled the strings that spilled hundreds of thousands of erstwhile useful citizens out to face this present bestiality. War was wrong: in concept and practice it was wrong! A thousand muddy, almost obliterated graves as testimonials to a minor, vainglorious politician's vanity! Old shibboleths were wiped out by war's merciless hand, old ideals of chivalry and loyalty were shaken to ruin. Resentment surged in one's soul: here were men who had sacrificed all the niceties of existence, condemning their dependents to poverty and want in order to satisfy an ideal, discovering that the ideal was in no wise worthy the worship that had been accorded. We "civilian helpers" were endeavouring to make good on army pay whilst our hostages to fortune were coping with altered conditions at home on such of our wages as could be spared from the terribly expensive living rates in the field. Our ordinary incomes, hardly won, had been divided by five or ten—we were creating nothing, we were doing nothing worth-while; and those at home were fighting an even grimmer battle than were we, against opportunists, food-hoarders and profiteers.

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And we could do nothing to help. We could not, thanks to the censorship, even tell where we were or what we were doing. The enemy, knowing everything, greeted our division in broad Yorkshire across No-Man's-Land when it entered the trenches; they knew of every unit opposed to them, but the wives of the men of the units knew nothing—nothing. In a way it was laughable; in another, it was grimmest tragedy. But the censorship must be maintained because it was a War Office order, and that War Office was presided over by one who had established an iron-hard censorship during the Boer War. Too, the censorship made occupation for many quite charming officers who might otherwise have discovered themselves unemployed or required to adventure into the danger-zone.

Futility! That was the most descriptive word to apply to the entire wild business. We, the *hoi polloi,* were to blame, because we'd handed over control of our national destinies to a military caste whose trade was war. We had discouraged our politicians to rattle the sword. We had applauded vociferously when those politicians, faced with dilemma, had expressed intention of consulting their military advisers, whose every interest was in a war, and who would naturally advise war as a solution to all problems, because in war they saw their own advancement. We'd cheered when military bands went clamorously past as we'd admired picturesque uniforms. We'd esteemed the military man a sort of demigod, and our wives had esteemed it an honour to be received by the wives of professional soldiers, because military officers were supposed to be the direct descendants of the gallant knights of ancient days. We had not realized that soldiering was as much a trade as buying or selling over a counter. We did not understand that the man under the uniform was as much concerned with his own personal advancement as any income-tax collector!

The whole idea of armed force as a court of ultimate appeal is wrong to the roots. Wise legislation prohibits the ordinary citizen from hitting his personal enemy with a brick

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if he chance to have a grievance because his next-door neighbour had endeavoured to seduce his wife, say. If such wrong has been done, the man in the street can appeal to a court and secure a legal divorce, with damages. The streets of a country town may not be turned into a shambles by reason of individual wrongdoing; but the cities of a continent may be razed and bathed in blood because of national wrongdoing. Civilization is a paradox. Whilst, on the one hand, we deplore law-breaking, maintaining a costly police force to prevent and detect wrongdoing, we glory in our own military law-breaking, which is as much opposed to the spiritual laws as the work of a "cat" burglar in Park Lane is opposed to the social laws of our little local environment.

Such thoughts fretted within us. During the months of stagnation I met three perfectly good major-generals, who, drinking whisky-sodas and congratulating each other that they could buy liqueur whisky at sixteen shillings a dozen bottles when civilians at home were paying increasing prices, avowed that they would lift neither hand nor finger to advance the war until they had won promotion. Self, self—the aggrandizement of self, struck me as being the prevalent complaint out there in the war-zone. A general, holding high command, threw a battalion of a thousand men to their death, ordering an unnecessary bayonet-charge on an enemy strong-post that could have been shelled out of existence in ten minutes, and got desired promotion and decorations. A bewildered, befogged recruit of a Territorial unit, striking a red-cap sergeant-major who had settled on him as a fit target for obscene profanity, was court-martialled and sentenced to be shot at dawn!

The mad scurry for promotion and the award of decorations was disgusting. The ruling caste, in which we were advised to put our blind faith, was failing, proving its feet to be clay. German prisoners, questioned as they trudged to the pens, seemed of much the same opinion. They did not know why they were fighting, they did not know anything except that they were very frightened, and were glad to be at last safely taken

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prisoners and lifted from peril. They were merely tools in the hands of arrogant self-seekers who, sitting comfortably and securely in the rear, miles from all chance of harm, drove them to the unspeakable horror of bursting shells that tore men's faces away in collops, and hurled humanity by the thousand into shattered, blood-drenched awfulness. The instinct of the ordinary man is to tolerate and even love his kind; but behind ordinary humanity was a vast, relentless force that bade it hate and destroy, ravish and lay waste. The overweening vanity of semi-imbecile rulers who counted themselves divinely ordained to gratify their ambitions, no matter what price was paid, bathed the world in blood. The mistake the ruling caste made was in denying the possession of intelligence in the tools they used!

Things were wrong somewhere. Criticisms of the High Command were not permitted: it was a crime on a par with high treason to attempt censure, even in private messes, of the aloof military gods who juggled with our destinies. There were petty, nasty systems of espionage: opinions ventured privately over a dinner-table were flashed, as if by wireless, to higher quarters. Many men, assembled without alleviation of softer companionship, develop spiteful and gossiping traits.

But Second Ypres came to breed terror and fresh hatred, and lift us from our brooding melancholy. The enemy used poison gas, claiming as excuse that our lyddite was as poisonous as the worst forms of frightfulness they could devise. The line of the Salient was broken; reinforcements were to be rushed to the menaced area. Why the enemy did not follow up the initial advantage of Second Ypres has always been a mystery to me.

Our division was pushed up from the Fleurbaix sector to the Salient, to stay the poison-blasted line: on our way we found the Canadians pouring back, dying horribly as they retired, their faces blue because of the deadly poison and their lungs rotting as they coughed. Dying, they screamed out blasphemies against the horrid unfairness of it all. On our way we overtook ancient French Territorial troops, in

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corduroy and *képi*, armed with chassepots, the final reserves hastening to fill the gaps. And behind that broken defence line was not so much as a scratch in the ground to hinder the enemy from winning to his objective of the Channel ports.

Had he pushed his cavalry through that night the war must have ended in a month, except for the wrangling of the politicians. We had no worth-while reserves: the increasing millions in England were not yet ready for the field. But something—and perhaps it was a Divine miracle—halted the Hun and set him to work to consolidate his position; so the Channel ports were not achieved. But the Salient was a revolting shambles of death and torment. Men were gasping out their lives on the shell-torn pavements of Poperinghe as we passed through.

Horrors unspeakable, even to us who had grown sated with horrors, encountered us at every step. This, then, was war: the chivalrous adventure! It was horrible, beyond all power of words to tell. Men were used as the saturated clay was used to fill the insufficient sandbags. Man had lost his divine attributes by now; he was simply unconsidered raw material, something to stop gaping holes with, whether dead or alive.

Meantime, there was nothing else to do, save be as useful as possible in one's appointed sphere.

I went up to the Boesinghe trenches next day, through an awed world that stank terribly of death. Little groups of dazed men were still wandering aimlessly—remnants of big battalions. Even the springtime birds had hushed their songs and forgotten to fly. The sparse grass was withered and blighted by the death-clouds that had flowed over it. Dead men, dead horses, shattered guns, riven entanglements, trenches blown to nothing by the fury of the bombardment; blood-pools showing oily under a grey sky of frowning coldness: that was the Salient after Second Ypres. That and the ambulances jerking and jolting back towards the rear, each one crammed above capacity with our grievously wounded. Into this welter our Territorials marched, enemy shells bursting ahead, behind and on either side. They occupied and con-

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solidated what had been trenches; being for the most part Yorkshire colliers, they dug like the honest workmen they were, with no strike-leaders to insist on hours and wages. They looked on soldiering as the work of the moment—a job to be got through with as little waste of time as was possible. Digging parties from the obsolescent cavalry corps were sent to help: their precise military efforts failed to satisfy men who had been born with a shovel in their hands.

"Sithee, lad, this is th' reet way to honnle a shovel," they said, and went to earth like moles. Such of us as were not actually engaged in digging or wiring, wondered when the next gas-attack would be launched. There were hasty conferences, a searching for counteracting means. Our men were as unprepared as babes for anything beyond ordinary shell and lead and very infrequent steel. Urgent appeals were sent home, enthusiastic helpers prepared respirators—unsuitable as the event proved—and I was dispatched, per powerful motor, to find, throughout our occupied area, all the hypocarbonate of soda procurable.

It meant visiting Hazebrouck, St. Omer, Boulogne: every township that boasted so much as a photographer's studio was visited, and every crystal of the chemical was honestly bought —often at famine prices. Keg after keg was dispatched up the line; solutions were prepared. Hasty analysis showed that hypo was antidotal to poison gas as then used. Men were ordered to soak their handkerchiefs in the solution and bind the improvised masks about mouth and nostrils in the event of gas being released again. Another counter was discovered: on every fire-step of every trench was to be placed a box of shavings and tar, so that, the gas-alarms being given, the sentries might light the inflammable stuff and, by causing a wave of heat to rise above the parapet, lift the gas-cloud clear on the vitiated air. Tar and more tar was required; I visited Boulogne, bought tar from the chandlers, shipped it, hurried back. One forgot ordinary divisions of time during those hectic days and nights. A man slept at his job, ate when he could,

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because it seemed that unnumbered thousands of lives depended on his slickness.

Life became a nightmare—though not comparable to the lives of those in the rotting trenches, searched every hour with shell-fire. I saw patches of reddish earth and understood them to be definite places mentioned on the map. A whole township reduced to a stain in the mud, that was the Salient. Two or three fragments of *pavé* stood for a broad highway, along which generations of stolid peasants had driven their lumbering carts. Of Ypres itself, mangled and distorted, looking more like a mouthful of decayed teeth than a town, others have written in imperishable prose. One raced through this zone of ruin to report triumphantly the acquisition of more and yet more tar and hypo; one was held up at various points and asked to find a case of whisky, or to buy sparklet bulbs for Staff messes. Although world-shaking events were in progress the minor, trifling details of existence must continue. So the days and weeks went by.

A hurried five days' leave was secured; even amid these horrors the leave-roster went on. It was good to be back in sweet-scented England; but the leave was over before it was realized; and one had a feeling of desertion. Back again to the Salient; knowing what it was—the second voyage all over again! There were strange tales everywhere—of men dying like flies in unglazed railway carriages because of bitter cold; of troop-trains anchored in sidings that were constantly bombarded by enemy guns. There was the tale that the divisional commander, established in fighting headquarters under the German guns, refused to abandon his position—on the "Who's afraid" plea, though insisting that his Staff should seek cover—and that a shell had burst in his office, mangling him, though not killing outright. Nightmare succeeded nightmare: lists of good friends killed, a favourite battalion obliterated to satisfy a Brass Hat's vanity, and then, almost incredibly, a dispatch-rider arriving with news that my application for transfer to the Air Service was approved, and

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that I was to proceed to England forthwith and report to O.C. Kite Balloon Section, Roehampton—just when I seemed to be proving of some real value to the Army in the field!

What was a kite-balloon? I knew what a 'plane was because I'd experienced them; but a kite-balloon! Oh, yes, of course: one of those sausages that brooded over the trench-line. But those hitherto seen were either Belgian or French. Of course, the K.B.'s were run by the Navy. I went back to England, travelling *de luxe* on the staff-boat. A new adventure in a new dimension promised. One might be of some real use in the air, since the land was too muddied and torn to permit adequate expression of a man's zeal. A German shell missed the train on which I left Poperinghe by a yard as it steamed from the station!

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CHAPTER XXI

AIR-WORK

I FEAR I was not an unqualified success as an airman, Maybe I was too old, maybe I was too much of a rebel. I had my own ideas concerning the employment of observation balloons, and they did not always coincide with the ideas of my superior officers.

I didn't know what a failure I was going to be, however, when I took up duty at Roehampton: still under Army ægis, though the station was run by the Naval Air Service. The Army, however, was training itself in balloon work.

The day I joined I found myself an instructor, because an ex-sailor was supposed to know a lot about the air. I did my best to teach myself and others at the same time. Ballooning —free ballooning—as was necessary to qualify for a pilot's certificate, was interesting. It lacked the thrill and movement of aeroplane flying; but it promised to be of genuine use. The Navy side of it seemed most interesting; but I was not permitted to join the Naval side. Free balloon trips to the requisite number were made and a certificate granted—I started to train willing youngsters. Basil Hallam was amongst them—keen as mustard, anxious to get to real work, though Fate seemed determined to hamper him. He got his chance, and died—all too soon, alas! We were snowed under with candidates; all of them were trained. There was a shortage of rank and file to handle the great balloons; but the first Derby drafts poured in, and we had a thousand prime men to choose from. A big organization was growing up. After a few busy months I took No. 9 Section out to France and anchored it down at Nieppe, near Armentières.

The K. B.'s, being a new arm, were required to advertise themselves. The zealots of my small command wanted to do

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proper, worth-while work. It seemed to a lot of us a waste of effort and material to use a balloon, four thousand feet in air, to control the fire of 18-pounders on cross-roads easily discernible from the R.F.A's forward observation posts. Our idea was to get big, definite, worth-while results. Even yet we enthusiasts had not realized the attitude of the Brass Hats to the war. We didn't understand that if the officer commanding balloons forwarded imposing logs of shooting done, he might secure quick and good promotion. We weren't bothering about promotion: but we thought that in a balloon we had an arm that might contribute to damage the enemy properly. We wanted to control long-range shoots with big guns. Higher authority demanded that we should register eighteen-pounder fire on two-mile-distant cross-roads rather than engage enemy big gun batteries that were ruining French villages ten miles behind the firing line. The field-guns had a bit of ammunition to spare by this time—when the politicians were stumping England to assure England that the rumour of ammunition shortage was a *canard* and a plot on the enemy's part to compel the civil element to vote for peace—at any price. Some of the field batteries could afford to expend as much as a dozen rounds in perfecting long-established registrations on points of no particular military importance.

The heavies, on the other hand, had to save up their ammunition for a week or two before they could indulge in what they considered a proper shoot: that is, thirty rounds, or thereabouts; and when they had accumulated such a reserve they wanted to do some proper damage. They were keen to have us observe for them. We used to go around their messes hawking our balloon: offering its services to such batteries as had the best reserves of shell. But we hadn't learnt to elaborate our firing-logs. We were ignorant of even the elementary principles of eye-wash—what we wanted was results—to see big things happens as a result of our keenness.

Moreover, our first two balloons failed us ignominously: when inflated with gas after unpacking, they refused to ascend more than five hundred feet. We were blamed for that,

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not the manufacturers. Then we secured a French balloon that held its gas and soared to a triumphant height of four thousand feet, and seemed inclined to hold that altitude, or even a higher one, if our cable would hold out, indefinitely. It was possible to pull the leg of our immediate superior, who, posted on Kemmel Hill, could see from his hut window all four of the balloons of his command at first break of day, supposing the weather allowed the balloons to rise. If he failed to see one he immediately phoned the section commander concerned and asked the reason why. We were happily in a position to state, when wrung up, that the balloon was up, had been up, indeed, for a full half-hour before dawn, if not all night, but that it was so high that he probably hadn't noticed it. This annoyed him. We liked annoying him. We weren't popular with him, for he was an ambitious youth of twenty-three or four, who had toadied himself into promotion; and who appeared to think that the best interests of the services were studied if he chased from section to section, had each balloon pulled down, irrespective of what work that balloon was immediately doing, and ascending himself to full heights. At the end of each such perfect day he reported to his senior that he had spent so much time in the air, in so many different balloons—and so won the promotion his trifling soul so urgently desired. The curious thing was that he got away with it. "Time in the air" was the R.F.C. shibboleth of those days—it didn't seem to matter how that time was spent. Our senior wasted our time to satisfy his own greed—interrupted our careful shoots—and rather made us a laughing-stock with the heavies; but we were bound by discipline and could do nothing.

But our leader was better than some, who never went into the air at all. Indeed, one man who secured a wing never even qualified as a balloon pilot so far as I remember. I know I tried to get him up, but he was a serving soldier and wangled it so that he needn't; and took a squadron out to France without having left the ground.

But in the intervals, when left unmolested by authority, we

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tried to realize our ideals by training 12-inch guns and 9·2 howitzers on distant targets and shooting enemy country up generally.

One ballooning day stands out vividly in my memory. Commander of a battery of 6-inch Mark VII naval guns—beautiful tools, shooting as precisely as a rifle—phoned us to say that he had thirty honest-to-goodness rounds of ammunition conserved, and would welcome our co-operation in a worthwhile shoot. There was an enemy battery of 5·9's tucked away in that map-like landscape which, because of constant searching from our altitude, was as familiar to us as the palms of our hands. We, whose duty it was to observe suspicious movements, flattered ourselves that we knew precisely where that battery was cached. Its fire galled our own field-guns as it galled our supply-trains and punished various advanced headquarters. It had a nasty habit of sending heavy shell into the most unexpected places at most inopportune times. Its bag was heavy; it added considerably to our weekly casualty-lists; and here was a chance to blot it out.

Accordingly an observation officer of the 6-inch battery came along and joined me in the balloon car. I was merely a qualified pilot, not a competent observer. Had I not trained myself to understand all that was understandable about balloons over there in England during the first month of my transfer? Had I not made surprising free balloon flights a-many, over half England, valving down, when tired of the air, for choice on to a summery lawn where a tea-party was progressing? I feel I ought to have enlarged on the balloon training: to tell of the balloon pioneers I met and learnt from: Maitland, who knew no fear, and who jumped with a parachute from a balloon at a height of 13,000 feet—and was five minutes before he reached the clouds, and fourteen minutes in all in descending to a haystack, where he got dragged and bruised a bit; that Maitland who died tragically, not in the rush and hurtle of war as he would have desired, but when the big British airship came to grief over the Humber some little while ago: Dunville, who alternated dealings in whisky

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with very expert knowledge of the finer arts of balloon-craft; Turner, who was the hero of that astounding free flight into the heart of Russia, where he was taken for some weird devil from the high heavens and almost shot by the superstitious Cossacks; the Spencers, who were devoting all their energies to the fabrication of balloons that should eclipse the French fabrics, and who paid their women helpers half-guineas for making parachute descents at the Crystal Palace—the parachutists enjoying the experience and counting themselves well paid, whilst Flying Corps officers were earning Military Crosses for performing identical feats—I feel that I have missed an opportunity of recording contemporary history. But balloon training and its associations hardly seemed warlike enough for recounting.

In company with my artillery officer, then, I ascended to a height of four thousand feet and more. We went up with a rush, to give the ground staff a chance to get clear before the inevitable enemy bombardment of our pitch commenced. We had been carefully spotted, of course, by German aeroplanes, and not infrequently the hostile heavies sent a twenty-five yard bracket over our fixed steam-winch, which was a surprising landmark. We'd been promised a mobile motor-winch on which to wind the cable of the sausage; but the promise lagged in fulfilment.

The best part of a hundred men were required to handle the unwieldy gas-bag on the ground, and, being responsible for these men's safety, I naturally kept them exposed to shell-fire as little as possible, since nothing was to be gained by it. A.C.O. has to do a certain amount of thinking for others as well as himself. So we went up swiftly and the balloon crew scattered.

Presently, swaying there at the end of the wire cable, I was able to point out to my companion the precise gaps in a hedge distant four honest miles from our front line, which, to my way of thinking, stood for the enemy's gun-positions. It was an ideal day for distant observation: clear as crystal, with only a few wisps of cloud in the blue sky. Details seemed

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to leap out of the map with startling clarity. We were able to see even a hummocky mound that might represent Fritz's ammunition dump. Beyond was a fat and smug farm-house, obviously used as an officers' billet.

"Good enough!" said my gunner, and phoned his battery commander. We had our wire plugged straight through to battery whenever a shoot was on, through our own exchange; and to pet batteries, who could do good shooting, we ran private wires. The third shot from the 6-inchers fetched something up out of the earth's bowels.

'Target!" we signalled. It was a bull's-eye without shadow of doubt. The guns were relaid, and the enemy guns were taken *seriatim,* and put neatly out of action. It was for all the world like shooting at bottles at a country fair; we didn't seem able to miss. The beginnings of commotion were visible through our powerful observing binoculars. The balloon remained steady as a rock. A German sausage swiftly ascended from cover at the edge of a wood: an ominous sight. We'd thrown a bone into the kennel and the stir was commencing!

"We'd better have a slap at his ammunition dump now, don't you think?" asked my gunner, who was keen as a ferret at his job, thanking artillery saints for the opportunity to shoot seeingly and not in the dark. It seemed a wise thing to do—far better for that mound of hostile shell to burst in its own territory than in ours; so, controlling our fire, we abolished that dump, and might have been watching an eruption of Vesuvius; the upheaval was so sensational. No question about it: it was the dump!

"I bet a hat there are a few fat Huns snugged away in that farm," said my companion, echoing my own thought. So three six-inch shell were plopped into the inviting farm, leaving it comprehensively afire. There was a lot of dust, evidence that the occupants were leaving hastily in motors. The rest of the conserved thirty rounds were expended more or less at large on the roads leading from the farm in hope of securing a further bag. Altogether it was a pleasant morning's shoot-

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ing; and one K.B. seemed to be justifying its existence.

"I think I'd like to go down now," said the gunner; "I'm feeling a bit air-sick." He'd been air-sick all the time, but it hadn't affected his observation powers until the excitement abated.

I telephoned the ground, instructing Stringer, my Number One, to winch us down immediately. Jerry's sausage remained aloft, and there weren't any gunners we knew with ammunition enough to keep that K.B. busy. Before our balloon had descended a thousand feet the enemy guns were active. Their K.B. was obviously controlling their fire; so we rang up battery after battery with hope of finding a neglected round of ammunition available. However, there was nothing to be got. A signal went through to our wing, asking for aeroplane attentions; meanwhile a heavy cross-fire of 5·9 and 8·4 stuff was directed on my pitch, and also on the six-inch battery. Two hundred and seventy rounds—I counted them one by one—were plastered about us, with much noise and mess. I telephoned urgent orders to the ground that the balloon was to remain aloft and my men hug cover in the dugouts we had scooped out in view of precisely such a happening; and, as there was really nothing for us in the balloon car to do now, I watched how my orders were obeyed from my commanding altitude. The men were like a pack of schoolboys at a picnic: as soon as a shell burst I noticed them come scrambling out of the earth exactly as rabbits do when a ferret bolts them, and fight together for the nose-fuses of the enemy shell for souvenirs! They wanted to be obedient, but circumstances were too strong for them.

Gradually the monotony of the position and the increasing air-sickness of my companion urged me to make another attempt to descend; but every time the balloon dropped the threatening twenty-five yard bracket was laid over the winch as warning. The only thing to do to save the men was to order the sausage to remain in air until darkness came down to hide our activities. Had the winch been mobile we could, of

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course, have run it, towing the winch, to a distant spot and come down without trouble; but the winch was about as stationary as Gibraltar.

So now we experienced all the sensations of a good day's shooting: from the point of view of the pheasant. Shell after shell whined past us, to explode in the remote distance or thud uselessly to earth. Hun 'planes came slickly to inquire into our activities: they dropped bombs around and about us. One bomb, I remember, dropped fairly into the swimming-bath I'd caused my men to dig and finish in moments when otherwise they must have been bored—and the swimming-bath ceased to exist as anything but an unsightly puddle. Our own anti-aircraft guns, which were terribly few in the beginning of '16, engaged these enemy 'planes and kept them from approaching the balloon near enough to attack with machine-gun fire and explosive bullets. Our own 'planes came roaring out from the great aerodrome near Bailleul, and attacked, driving the Huns away in disorder. It was a growingly busy day, as a reward for our zeal. In the balloon we, the stirrers of the hornets' nest, were helpless in our own defence; we simply had to swing there at the end of the cable. We carried a sporting Lee-Enfield in the car for protection; and my gunner, conquering his air-sickness, got this and let drive at passing enemy 'planes: their pilots simply waved derisive hands at us. All the time we kept the parachutes handy, in case of a sudden "Abandon ship" call. We weren't sure how they would work, but tried to be hopeful. We arranged exactly what we'd do if the cable were shot away, as seemed very likely, for shell fragments were occasionally hitting the wire, as we could tell from the twanging vibrations. There were moments, indeed, when that excellent wire rope gave a good imitation of a one-stringed fiddle; but the tune it played was a dirge.

The wind was setting straight towards the enemy's lines; and it was hardly likely that we should receive courteous treatment if we fell into his hands. That demolished 5·9 battery must have been a particular pet of Wilhelm II, I fancy,

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judging by the stir and fuss its ruin appeared to have caused to the whole German army in the field. We went through the motions of harnessing ourselves to the parachutes and leaping from the car—simultaneously, so as not to capsize the balloon. Even under those circumstances, to leap blindly from four thousand feet seemed an unpleasant undertaking. We knew —at least, I knew—that the parachute would drop two or three hundred feet before it opened, with time for a lot of quick, confused thinking. There was a far from remote chance of the balloon being set on fire and falling faster than we did on top of us—to cremate us in mid-air; as actually happened to one of my plucky subs—Nops—at a later date. If we delayed and came down in No-Man's-Land we should be helpless targets for many machine-guns. Curse a man's imagination! Fighting folks shouldn't have such possessions! The bigger the imagination the keener the apprehension of horror!

But we, having pitched the stone into the pool, remained unhurt. Until night fell we remained aloft, then descended in sweet safety to find that havoc had been wrought about us. Everything that could be hit had been hit, saving only vital matters. Two hundred and seventy rounds of high explosive had beeen flung across our site; and not a single casualty resulted. There was not so much as a scratch, except for one man who had cut his finger in digging out a nose-cap! But the infantry blessed us for putting that 5·9 battery out of action, though our senior officer blamed us for not registering on more and still more cross-roads! We'd spent a whole day in recording one shoot, he said; whilst other balloons could show at least eighty targets engaged—by field guns! It was a funny life: the more you tried to do the less credit you got.

There was an element of sportsmanship amongst the rival Flying Corps of those days. Meeting your enemy in mid-air you fought him, naturally, for all you were worth, but, having licked him or been licked by him, there were moments for courtesy. A day or two following our stunt a German aeroplane was brought down by shellfire into my little camp.

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It had been pretty shooting on the part of our Archies: a direct hit on Fritz's engine. I chanced to be ballooning at the time and saw the engine jump out like a pea bursting from its pod; I saw the 'plane itself fold its wings and dash down like a hit bird, from sixteen thousand feet or thereabouts.

What dropped in our camp wasn't pleasant; but when the news was transmitted to H.Q. one of our 'planes flew out over the enemy lines to notify him that such and such of his aviators had met with honourable death, as was the custom. Next afternoon, when I was up aloft again—I made a point of taking the early-morning and sunset tours of duty in the air, since those were the times when visibility was best, as a rule, and most movement noticeable—and we got some good shooting as a result, when ammunition sufficed—I was buzzed from the ground by Stringer, who was a bright lad—a cavalryman who had retreated from Mons and fought that stirring fight in Hazebrouck market-place—who carried on his shoulders as shrewd a head as I ever encountered in a somewhat chequered career, and who richly deserved the wing and D.S.O he got—to ask me if I knew an enemy 'plane was directly over my head. I had seen nothing as I had heard nothing, being engaged in a little private shooting with a twelve-inch gun whose owner hungered to strafe Comines railway station. The bulk of the big gasbag hid the Boche airman from my view. I told Stringer to apply to the nearest A.A. battery for aerial protection; but before it could be given, the enemy came into sight, banked, performed a few minor evolutions round my basket, and then dropped something. I naturally imagined it to be a bomb, aimed for my winch—which, smoking bravely, formed a handsome target. But it wasn't a bomb; it missed the balloon by a narrow margin, and dropped on the roof of the hut we'd built for a canteen, disclosed itself as a wreath, with a request attached that we would lay it on the grave of the dead German aviators. Details like this savoured of chivalry; but for the most part it was a slaughterous affair: a case of killing or being killed.

Even so, there were diversions. When bad weather forbade

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flying, something had to be done to keep the men employed, physically and mentally, and so out of mischief. There were also long spells when the balloon was in the air, and the crew inactive. I knew by past experience how idleness breeds green sickness; and taking Stringer into counsel, together with E. H. Robinson, late King's Prizeman at Bisley, and who had gallantly left his desk as editor of *Chums* to embark on the hazards of life in the R.F.C. under my command, we planned programs of work and entertainment that gave them small leisure. They were made to build a canteen out of materials scrounged and cadged; for our camp-site when shown to us was merely a bare bog, without a bush standing; and having a canteen naturally meant a pierrot troupe. We formed a rattling good troupe, for I'd had first pick of the cream of the Derby recruits when building my section at Roehampton, and, realizing that fighting wasn't all standing to arms, I'd kept an eye on the lighter side of existence. We decided to open the canteen in style, with the troupe giving its initial performance; but—on the evening in question the gas alert was sounded.

That seemed to tear things; but we decided to carry on, in a state of preparation. Our mechanist-sergeant-major, who'd owned a thriving garage in Johannesburg prior to enlisting, had evolved an elaborate system of lighting the canteen with acetylene gas. As we assembled within the building orders were given to the sentry—the *peri* at Paradise's gates—to report immediately any suspicion of poison gas approaching our camp, in order that gas-masks might be donned. Gas-masks, though of an inferior pattern, were supplied in early '16.

In the well-lit interior, the windows carefully shrouded, the opening ceremony commenced—C.O. making the inevitable speech, telling the inevitable story. The pierrot troupe swung into lively action. We'd stolen a piano from Ypres, which was a happy hunting-ground for oddments when you could dodge the town-major; and revelry ran high. We'd found a keg of honest English ale at a shop in Bailleul and

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gifted it to the men, as a change from the local beer, which, as censored letters said, cost a penny a glass and required a pound's worth to create even a pleasurable feeling of partial intoxication. Amongst the men were numerous merchant sailors—be sure I'd bagged them at the outset for their very handiness—and my flight-sergeant had been a boatswain. We joined forces and sang chanties in approved windjammer style; and were in the full swing of "Away Rio," when the door opened and the sentry appeared—a smart, eager youngster enough. He presented arms with the precision of a guardsman at a Base and announced:

"Sir, the gas has come!" for all the world as if he were announcing the arrival of a corps commander. So there was a scramble to don the masks, which muffled our merriment. However, it proved to be only a leak in the acetylene lighting system after all—the penetrating odour had played on a lively imagination. But the real gas did come often and often, and nasty stuff it was.

One of my subs, Gavin, a boy in the Black Watch originally, distinguished himself about this time. He was aloft observing when the cable was cut by a shell-fragment. In the car with Gavin was a gunner officer; and the drifting balloon set off towards the enemy lines. Gavin fixed the parachute gear about his companion, shoved him out of the car so that he made an excellent descent in Ploegstreet Wood; destroyed all papers that might carry a trace of information to the enemy, and then, setting fire to the sausage, came out in his own parachute and dropped to earth on our own front-line parapet under heavy machine-gun fire from the enemy, that left him unhurt, though he was dragged and scratched a bit on our wire entanglements. For this he was awarded the M.C.; the first to come the way of the K.B.'s in France, I think I am right in saying.

Gavin was luckier than unfortunate Radford, who was Basil Hallam, the famous London revue star, and whom I have previously mentioned as training under me at Roehampton. He wanted to join our section, but was persuaded to join an-

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other, where his many excellent qualities promised to help his C.O., who wasn't blessed with another Stringer, as I was. In forming the early sections I tried to play fair, and give each unit a portion of the cream; and I knew the section that got Basil Hallam would be a lucky one. For Hallam was a white man, judged by the most exacting standards: a troubadour of the old type, and a perfect thoroughbred.

Whilst serving with his section not far from our pitch, he met his tragic death. Let it be remembered that in the early days of parachuting, shoulder harness only was fitted to the parachutes: a trifling arrangement of canvas straps to go under a man's armpits. The parachutes themselves—beautiful affairs of corded silk with a spread of some thirty feet or so, were neatly packed into canvas bags suspended to the sides of the car. Folding a parachute was a fine art; for if wrongly folded it would probably fail to open, with disastrous results. In order to prevent the parachute falling out of its container at awkward moments, elastic held the bag mouth closed. The elastic of one of Hallam's parachute bags had perished, and there being neither time nor opportunity to renew, a bit of aerial lacing was knotted about the mouth.

In company with a gunner, Hallam ascended to engage an enemy gun-position. The cable parting, the balloon commenced to drift to enemy territory. Hallam saw his passenger safely overboard in one parachute—the gunner making an excellent landing—and Hallam himself swung out of the car in the shoulder harness. The knotted aerial lacing refused to release the parachute; Hallam reached up to untie it, and slipped through the harness, from a height of seven thousand feet. England lost a gallant gentleman when Basil Hallam died.

Amongst my men was one named Hobbs, aged, I fancy, somewhere about fifty-two; but when the Derby scheme originated he swore himself in as aged thirty-eight. He was a counterman at a suburban departmental store, he was flat-footed and troubled with bronchitis; but somehow he had wangled enlistment, whilst younger, haler men were sheltering in protected occupations. Coming to Roehampton I real-

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ized the man's excellent spirit and also his physical deficiencies; so I made him my batman, in order to ease him from fatiguing parades which he was not fitted to attend. He made a very faithful and conscientious servant, for in him the spirit of service was deeply implanted. I do not think he had ever been out of sight of a policeman or a bus in his life. In peace-time his main dissipation was reading the sporting pages of the evening papers; he, who had never seen a horse-race. He tended me, his master according to Army Regulations, much as an elderly mother tends an unexpected child born late in her life. I was not allowed even to lace my own boots. I have a sneaking fear that he spent most of his pay in boot-polish and suchlike oddments for my greater smartness.

Hobbs enrolled himself in the pierrot troupe. His forte was melodramatic recitation, and, judged by elocutionary standards, he was not brilliant. He was always very earnest, however, and his turn filled the gap between a sparring match —two first-rate amateur pugs contesting—and a banjo solo performed in such style as merited the player's appointment to any variety stage.

Hearing that our section owned its pierrot troupe, a request was forwarded from the 6th Scottish Fusiliers, then commanded by Winston Churchill, inviting us to give them a show whilst they rested in the heart of Ploegstreet Wood. Occupying a comparatively cushy position two or three miles back, we were only too happy to oblige. By Crossley tender we of the troupe proceeded to the Wood, where we found the battalion—such as remained of it, snugged in a tumbledown barn, shell-riddled like a colander. The show proceeded along accustomed lines, and Hobbs in his turn mounted the two planks on a couple of beer-barrels that formed the stage. His recitation that night was Henty's "Last Shot"— "Three of them to ride and two of them to die." Hobbs got well under way, reciting much as a third-standard schoolboy recites, with phlegmatic accent and jerky gestures. In the middle of the performance the enemy began to lob pip-squeaks over the barn. They came closer and closer—alarmingly closer, indeed.

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It appeared as if they might even come closer still—into the music-hall, indeed. We began to edge in towards one another, as men do, for comfort and protection. A shell-burst doesn't sound half so alarming if you can feel another man's sleeve against your own: human contact seems the best companion in the ghastly loneliness of death. Hobbs went on reciting: unfalteringly, as emotionally as a marionette. The shelling ceased after a bit of the barn was blown away.

Returning, with Hobbs caring for me like a nurse, I asked him: "How did you feel when those shells were coming over, Hobbs?" This was his first experience of really close shell-fire.

"Why, sir, were those shells?" he asked. "I was so interested in remembering that recitation, sir, that I hadn't time to notice them!" There, I think, was the real spirit that won the war, despite the countless blunders and the criminal tragedies. The rank and file—the P.B.I. for choice—were so interested in doing their appointed work that they had no time for fear, or for anything else but the straight, clean performance of any duty that came their way: whether that duty consisted in digging support trenches in the rear, lugging supplies through the welter of shell-holes and sickening mud that was the usual route from refilling point to trench, or whether it consisted in crossing No-Man's-Land, with the hells of a barrage fire that might easily fall short, to seize enemy positions with bayonet and bomb. It was their immediate job—their work, as these newly-made soldiers called it—and the sooner it was done the sooner to rest. The last rest for most of them, alas!

But whenever work was possible we sent the balloon aloft, and maintained a merciless and, I hope, effective watch on the enemy's lines, spotting his gun-positions, his troop-movements, his transport; and, whenever ammunition was available, doing our best to upset his plans. For our own part we thought we were doing good solid work; and various Artillery Generals thought the same. They used to come up in the balloon with me, and in the intervals of shooting, show me portraits

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of their wives and children—especially the Australians. But the squadron commander failed to recognize my work at my own valuation. Constant quarrels occurred between us; and though several Brass Hats championed me, it ended in my returning to my unit—in a certain amount of disgrace, I fear. You may not tell your senior officer your exact opinion of him in real deep-water language, without bowdlerizing, and escape official notice. Anyhow, I'd experienced another dimension of the war; and had the consolation that I left good men behind to till the seeds I'd tried to plant. Summed up, my air-work seems to have been a few hectic shots, a few equally hectic parachute descents—ugh! that first drop when you come out of the car and wonder if the parachute is going to open or not!—and a good deal of intrigue. With this experience tucked away I went to the Base for disposal, and, after a week there—where was no hint of war—returned to my old Division in time for First Somme.

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CHAPTER XXII

ODD JOBS

I COULD have stayed at the Base and led a leisurely life: I was invited so to do; but whilst magnificent it was not war. I found my old unit at Forceville, and discovered changes. A subaltern was required, not a senior officer; I was redundant. The old C.O. had gone home to be replaced by another. There were busy days during that military tragedy of the Somme, when men died by the thousand to no real effect. Then came a lull, and I found myself appointed Town Major of the area. It was a very interesting job—because it meant putting men into accommodation that didn't exist. The official billeting capacity of that area was for six thousand troops. Usually I had seventeen or eighteen thousand packed away, with more to come. I used to do my best: and leave the various units to fight it out: they managed somehow. Interesting cameos shaped themselves—battle-blinded men wandered into my office for rest, told ghastly, unbelievable tales, as they rested against the wall-paper and purred gratitude. Many of them considered leaning against a strip of wall-paper the acme of luxury. If I'd had a hundred beds in that office instead of one I could have filled them all. I did my best, Heaven knows!

One machine-gunner drifted in: dazed, shaken, crying. He had wandered back from Thiepval, after being engaged in an attack that carried a German position. In the attack his brother was wounded; when the enemy counter-attacked the wounded man was left in a dug-out. The British attacked again, recaptured the post, and my visitor discovered his brother sliced to rashers by Boche bayonets. There were stories of unbelievable heroism. One Australian who wandered in had a hobby of sprinting across No-Man's Land, capturing a German soldier, hauling him back across his shoulder. He did

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wild things like that—would creep into an enemy trench alone and bomb a dug-out, returning with a helmet as proof. He took a strong-post single-handed, after a battalion had been wiped out in attempting it: creeping up under the walls inch by inch and bombing the garrison to pieces through their own loopholes. He already had an M.C. and bar; and one morning, as he tumbled into his own trench with a German prisoner or one of our wounded that he'd lifted off the enemy barbed-wire, a Brigadier saw him and threatened to recommend him for the V.C. if he didn't take care. However, he was killed in time.

Troops drifted through the village: "Bantams," Highlanders, Guards, Australians—always an unceasing stream of humanity bound for the shambles. One evening, when the major part of an Anzac division was billeted in the town, one of my policemen fetched me to deal with a disturbance. Two men were fighting in a ring formed by their comrades. They were in their shirts and pants. I parted them, caused them to shake hands; told them to don their tunics. One put on a private's, the other a captain's! Officially supposed to sit tight and oversee the town, I used to sneak away and see fights—and mourn the seeming futility of it all. I stumbled over dead friends: men who had entertained me in their peacetime messes. I found a boy I'd known a year before commanding his battalion at twenty-two. All my closest friends were dead or invalided home; and I had grown away from my own unit. The thunder of the guns was incessant; aerial combats of frequent occurrence; and the close, stale stench of death hung everywhere in the blasted world. Men moved like gaunt shadows for the most part, and the old-time gaiety was quenched—no man knew when next he would be earmarked for death. An acquaintance returned from leave—yes, even during the Somme!—with new gramophone records; before he could unpack them he was detailed for trench-duty and shot through the head before he reached his destination. Nothing seemed to matter except the performance of routine duties and the foreboding of slaughter. You lived from day to day, from hour

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to hour almost—making no plans, acquiring no perspectives.

Jutland had been fought—a British victory said some, a British defeat said others, and the condition had reached stalemate or something perilously like it. Staggered infantrymen, bemused, retching, would reel back from the firing-line to my office and beseech me to motor them to Amiens, where they could see a clean table-cloth and hear the frou-frou of silk. Mud and blood and Kirchner drawings: these were the key-notes of the Somme. And the music—the stammer of aerial machine-guns and the whining of the long-range shells. For recreation I used to go into Forceville church and help the R.A.M.C. tend the wounded as they were decanted from the unceasing ambulances. I was required by force of circumstances to count myself a back number—too old for genuine combatant service; I could only stand amongst the watchers who cheered the fighters on.

Then I was transferred to G.H.Q. to a job that was purely a sinecure: an official compiler of war records.

Once resigned to the fact that my sphere of usefulness lay not in the battle-line but amongst the chroniclers, G.H.Q. possessed merits. One realized more of the war as a whole there than in the line. One understood that these gigantic battles were in reality merely pin-pricks, a process of slow and costly attrition: a waiting until America could be tempted in with her enormous reserves of men and material. Germany had won on points: she had defied all civilization and carried her bluff; but if America only came in the tables would be turned.

G.H.Q., when I reached it, was established at Montreuil, that ancient walled town on Boulogne Road; though Advanced G.H.Q. was nearer the line at Hesdin. I hadn't much to do—there were no excitement worth the mentioning. Time flowed tranquilly in pleasant surroundings. The actual war was very remote. There was resentment amongst the military caste because civilians were being brought in to teach them their job under Lloyd George's ægis. Geddes was recasting the entire transport system of the Army in the Field—on the plan

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that this was an unprecedented war and could no longer be nibbled at. He was pulling up English railway systems and transporting them bodily to Flanders; and the military autocrats forecast disaster. Maybury was making roads—not content with shovelling a cartload of rubble over a mile of shell-torn highway; he was carving and metalling new roads, permanent affairs. The war was being accepted as something likely to endure for a generation. Munition factories were being established in France itself. It was decided that, after the ineffective splendour of the Somme nothing remained save to mark time, and make preparation for a further offensive next year. He that believed would not make haste! Fighting G.H.Q. shifted back to Montreuil; Cæsar went into winter quarters.

At Wireless we busied ourselves variously—experimenting with values of various forms of communication. Rivalry existed between Wireless and the Pigeon Service. Each did its best to advertise its own merits. The records of fighting units were scrutinized for proof of the systems' utility. Pigeons made a trial stunt: carrier pigeons were taken forward in an attack, to be released with messages. A demonstration was prepared at Pigeon H.Q. Brass-hats, like a revue chorus, assembled to await the arrival of the carriers. After long patience a bedraggled pigeon hopped into its loft. No one below the rank of a Major-General might handle it. On its leg was the message-holding cylinder.

"News—news!" There was a breath-stopped pause as the flimsy message was carefully taken from its receptacle and unrolled.

"I've carried this b——y bird far enough!" was the message. One down for Pigeons.

A wireless trench outfit was established in the firing-line. Urgent representations from infantry commanders: "Beg to report that immediately wireless mast is erected enemy trench-mortars bombard sector of trench heavily!" One down for Wireless!

Bertram Stephenson, of the Intelligence Corps with Tre-

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mellen, of Wireless, contrived to solve the German Zeppelin direction code—an ingenious contrivance; and directional wireless came into play. We established a wireless plotting station at G.H.Q. and followed every Zeppelin flight by signals. Four directional stations and one control in enemy territory guided the airships when they started out on their devastating journeys; and we collected their signals, deciphered them, plotted the changing Zeppelin positions on the charts. Early morning wireless activity in the Heligoland Bight might mean anything: practice manœuvres probably on the part of the Naval Zeps. But if wireless activity showed in the Schutte-Lanz stations ashore as well, we assumed a raid was projected; and if the Naval airships passed a certain line in the Bight we were sure. We followed their concentrations —the land-ships coming up the railway towards Dunkirk; the Naval ships moving over Denmark towards the Texel, which light they obviously used as a point of departure. We sent word to England when a raid was in progress; and our own directional stations got busy, supplementing the German position-reports. The enemy had only four, or at most five directional lines to work with to provide an intersection; but we had these and eight others from our own direction-finding stations; we could pin down their changing positions very accurately. I still have charts showing the devious courses they took, showing how they hesitated ere crossing the English coast-line, how they proceeded to Liverpool and Glasgow and Southampton. Not infrequently we heard their S.O.S.'s as they were brought down—dying into a wail like the cry of a drowning child. There are dictaphone records still existent, I believe, containing the actual death-cries of certain Zeppelins. And almost as the whining ceased—and we could only surmise what damage had been done to London and England generally ere the retribution came—there would come flashed over the wire from London: "One down at So-and-So." It was an eerie task there through the night hours, plotting down the movements phase by phase, wiring positions to the affected areas; hundreds of miles away, in many cases; and

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knowing that this unspectacular work was actually helping to destroy the raiders.

Occasionally we were raided ourselves, with bombs dropping freely in startling proximity to our station. But we rebels always said the enemy 'planes and Zeps carefully avoided G.H.Q., having no wish to destroy their best allies.

One night a fleet of Zeppelins visited England, were turned and came back. But something happened—and we never quite knew what. They came back over Beauvais, where they were engaged; they passed on and on—heading towards the Mediterranean. Maybe they climbed so high they froze their engines—they disappeared, that is all—and so far as we were concerned they never reappeared.

The King came out to visit his Army; Cabinet Ministers came—the war-zone was an object of interest, promising to become a tourist centre, indeed. Winter came to bring semi-stagnation, winter passed. One of my fellow-officers at Wireless Intelligence was Wright, who accompanied Scott in his ill-fated expedition to the South Pole, who discovered the dead explorer in that tragic Antarctic tent; he lectured on his adventure, with John Buchan in the chair. Buchan was then a second lieutenant; he presently developed into a colonel in charge of propaganda, and I could have secured a berth at that; but—a new fret was in my wayward blood. I couldn't seem to remember that I was a back number, that I ought to be content with arm-chairs and hot-water bottles. I got news that my old ship, the *Ivernia,* had been sunk—that Alice and Claude Askew, my friends, had perished. An ambition to sink a submarine troubled me. It was foolish, no doubt, but there it was. Furthermore, after these years of mud, there was a hankering for an existence into which mud did not enter. All said and done, I was primarily a sailor—I'd not made good in the air; but mightn't it be on the cards that I should find my niche at sea? Too, there was the chance of seeing yet another dimension of this world-war. Army advancement didn't seem to mean anything; in common with many others I felt I wanted a job that was actually helping to bring peace.

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A visit in company with Wright to Dunkirk, to see a ship, with a hope of meeting Captain Evans, also of Antarctic glory, but of newer "Broke" fame, didn't make for contentment, either. We didn't see Evans, because he was out on patrol, with his destroyers; but we did get mixed up in a triple bombardment of Dunkirk: from Big Bertha on land, German destroyers manœuvring behind a smoke-screen afloat, and Zeppelins and 'planes in the air. At that time Dunkirk was a focus of concentrated hate. Wright and I narrowly escaped death that night.

"Let's dine at Jules's," he said. Jules's was a favourite rendezvous of French and British officers: a decent meal could be got at a fair price.

"Let's go somewhere where we shan't see a damned uniform!" suggested I; and carried the point. We had an omelette in a café in a side-street known only to the favoured few; and whilst we ate it, a bomb was dropped fairly into Jules's, killing twenty-five Allied officers.

The streets were full of noise and flying death. The marvel to me is that thousands were not destroyed; actually the death-roll was numbered only in scores. By contrast with it all the Navy offered temptations. I put on my thinking-cap and wore it for some time afterwards.

G.H.Q. presently shifted forward to Blandecques; stir of coming events was in the air. America was actually committed to the war at last, went the story, thanks to the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Already alert, exquisitely polite U.S. officers were appearing amongst us in the guise of humble learners: there was nothing arrogant or bombastic about them. "Stand aside and let's end this war for you!" wasn't their slogan then, whatever it became afterwards.

"We understand that you're veterans, we want to profit by your experience," they told us. "We're two and a half years late, and we've a lot to make up."

We taught them all we could; and realized anew what a lot there was to learn in the war-game.

Easter came—Passchendaele was fought; the Canadians go-

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ing over the ridge waist-deep in mud, in driving sleet. Our cavalry moved up and went into action behind the infantry, leading their horses, losing them by the thousand in the hideous mire. The military road up which I went, in company with my O.C., on the heels of the attack, was knee-deep in liquid mud; but to stray from its security meant instant smothering in what was simply a bog. I doubt if I shall ever forget that Easter night on Passchendaele Ridge: it was really my last land-battle. Cold, hellish dark, bleak, with a gale whining; ourselves in a car moving by inches at a time on account of the congested traffic everywhere; no lights permitted; a sense of portent and dread hanging low; ammunition mules, with 18-pounder cartridge jangling on their pack-saddles, poking their heads over the back of the car; the occasional flash of a star-shell followed by the scream and burst of a high-explosive somewhere along that pitiless road; blind wallowing—and yet, notwithstanding the confusion and the sightlessness, a sense of controlled movement: a Staff officer blinding me because I'd ventured to flash a ray from a torch to our off-side wheel, as a guide to the driver; a hand belonging to an unseen, unknown entity thrusting a canteen of rum against my lips, with a "Swig at this—the shells don't burst so loud then!" the radiator poking into the muzzle of a halted 18-pounder; an ambulance skidding into the ditch—phew! A chapter could not adequately describe that night. The Canadians, having taken the ridge, too exhausted to do more, simply scraped holes in the road-bank, hung their waterproof sheets over the openings, and burrowed there like rabbits. We threaded our way patiently and reached our objective: a wireless squad linked to an advanced unit in captured enemy trenches. Dead men formed our carpet when we left the useless car and proceeded afoot. Dead men slid on us from rain-crumbled parapet, plopped literally into our arms. Break of day was the signal for an intensive enemy bombardment that sent us down into capacious enemy dug-outs like Rome's catacombs —electrically-lit, with running water and decorations! We were properly in the thick of the real thing; and the stunning

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excitement of it all was such that one forgot to be afraid. It was amazing how near the shells came without destroying us all. They burst within five yards, within five feet, sometimes; the splinters rattled on our tin hats—our heads were bruised and bleeding when we removed those excellent headdresses; but we weren't really hurt. Machine-gun bullets plopped into the mud at our very ears, splashing us without mercy—we weren't hit. It seemed incredible that men could live under that death-blast; but we lived. We could do nothing to retaliate, only trust in our own guns which were replying vociferously to the German fire.

No doubt the official history of Passchendaele tells in detail of all that was done, of the military significance of the engagement, of the sterling gallantry of all involved. I've never read it—Passchendaele to me was a corner of hell, superheated, and liquid mud poured over the leaping flames. Turning an angle of a captured trench:

"One for O.C. Pigeons!" grunted my C.O. There was a frying-pan on the fire-step; there were feathers and a little blood—so whether a situation had been saved by the Pigeon Service or not, some hungry man had stayed his stomach-pangs!

"As likely as not they used our wireless pole to cook it!" said the C.O. "Who's to blame 'em, anyhow!" But our men hadn't—they'd set up the wireless gear and were signalling steadily, under a close trench-mortar fire. We stayed with them for some time, eating biscuit and drinking rum; went on to another point, saw more horrors, saw, too, more splendours. Through a periscope—it were death to show head above the parapet—I witnessed two of our men, working with the precision of machines, crawl belly-flat across a waste of shell-holes to bring in a wounded man lying huddled on barbed wire. They were almost invisible, and German machine-gun fire spat over them and all about them. They reached their objective, however; and then, apparently, changed their plan; for, after disentangling the sufferer, they continued, and bombed the machine-gun squad out of its shell hole; did a

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bit of bayonet-work, apparently; returned to carry the hurt man into temporary safety. I suppose hundreds of similar incidents must have been happening within a mile on either side.

We presently returned to a saner life, satisfied that the wireless was accounting for its existence. We dined sumptuously that night in Amiens: civilization again, and the horrors of the bloody firing-line as remote as our youth; and so to G.H.Q.

There are vignettes: one of a sergeant in a Canadian casualty-clearing station who hoaxed the entire Staff with a device for destroying humanity in gross by means of a projected death-ray. He gave demonstrations with his little box like a camera, using rabbits as his target; they simply curled up and died when he turned on the juice. He had invented also an X-ray contraption that photographed the hidden organs of the body in their proper perspective; he showed portraits of Zeppelins escorted by Taubes flying over Amiens, taken at midnight—wonderful! They promoted him to Captain forthwith; took him to England with the idea of making him a General. Countless projectors were to be made, and, at the opportune moment, were to be turned on to the enemy, so that our troops could march to Berlin over piles of their instantaneously slain. But after a while suspicions were aroused—our O. C. was sent to investigate the projector. I accompanied him; Wright, too. We tried the projector; it didn't work. Neither did the X-rays. We advanced the projector so close to a rabbit's nose that a spark jumped the gap; the rabbit scratched itself and seemed to laugh. It wouldn't die, anyhow. The Canadian, asked for reasons, went sick. The whole thing was a hoax, craftily worked, but it almost succeeded; and the author was court-martialled and sentenced to two years in the chain-gang at Havre, then to be returned to an infantry unit and put in the forefront of the battle. He'd pulled the leg of the General Staff, and it's a wonder to me he wasn't shot at dawn!

I met a man who had been shot through the brain in the

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Mons retreat, left for dead on the field, taken by the enemy to one of his hospitals and tended by a French surgeon. He wrote a book about his experiences, and a thoroughly interesting book it was: he gave me a copy. He shammed paralysis until he was exchanged; then his paralysis mended, and he was now an Intelligence Officer. I met another man, who had got a V.C. for holding a position against impossible odds—he'd been shot through the brain, too, and didn't seem any the worse for it, except that he was blind in one eye. I passed up streets at G.H.Q. and heard the Chief Intelligence Officer, who was deaf, roaring out State secrets in a voice that threatened to carry to the enemy lines; went to fresh trenches, saw more marvels. Then came Flers and the first tanks; and I watched those ungainly, clamorous monsters go into action. Nothing seemed to stop them: they either pushed down or climbed over the German strong-points, pursuing a blind, desperate course, and—tragically—crushing our own wounded to death in their passage. They nosed down the streets of enemy towns and spread terror; one or two were checked, the people inside descended and fought like Paladins until they died.

In the evenings the aeroplanes came hiving home and stunted over the big Head-quarters aerodrome.

Then a naval officer of high rank came to France on a tour, and I was deputed to pilot him about the points of interest. He was an enjoyable companion, because he had a lot to tell about the Battle of Jutland, in which he had taken rather a considerable part. I did my best by him—and I flatter myself there was very little he didn't see—from kite balloons to tanks; with a spell at a howitzer battery and a long trudge down fire-trenches, with snipers' bullets whining past his tin hat. When he had seen enough for one day I took him to dinner at an officers' club, and over a pipe he asked:

"What're you, a sailor, doing out in this galley?"

"Wasting time, from the look of it," I said. "I'm too old for fighting-tricks, they say; got to be content with the background."

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"We're in need of practical sailors for some new submarine-strafers we're getting out at home," he mentioned. "Care for that sort of job?" I thought of the tales I'd heard of U-boat activities; not only aboard the original transport, but also at Boulogne, where I occasionally had to go. I remembered, too, the *Ivernia*—my favourite ship.

"There's nothing I'd like better than to sink a U-boat!" I told him. "Is there any chance?"

"At our end, yes; what about yours? I'll pull strings to get you appointed."

We parted on that understanding. A few days later I had a letter from him: he said I was to get a PQ boat, and the sooner I came over the better. But I didn't get over all at once. I applied and reapplied—I was doing no real good; but, no—I couldn't be spared. They wanted sailors to serve with the Water Transport; why hadn't I long ago applied for that? I didn't want to be a bargee, I wanted to sink a submarine. Well, I couldn't be spared—didn't I realize there was a war on?

I put the matter fairly to a Staff officer of my acquaintance. "How does one get a transfer to the Navy?" I asked.

"Buy So-and-so a dinner at Amiens," he advised. I did—a good dinner. Two days later I was on my way home to become a naval officer. The third dimension promised rosily. I left the peace of G.H.Q. and reached London in the middle of an air-raid!

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE WHITE ENSIGN

In the changing-over process I snaffled a spot of welcome leave, and wrote a story or two to help the family exchequer, now much depleted. But no written words seemed to do real justice to the horrors of war. Coming home I smuggled an article I had written in which I tried to show things as they really were to an editorial office. It was submitted to the censor, who sternly forbade its publication, and insisted on knowing the name of the author. The article was published, but the officer's name was withheld. I'd like to embody that article in this volume, but I suppose I'd better not; maybe the venom of the war-time would taste too acridly in these forgetting years. It was simply an attempt to open England's eyes to the countless injustices that were going forward in France—the sacrifice of the civilian helpers to the advancement of the Regular Army. I had dipped the pen of spleen into the ink of bitterness; but it was true—oh, believe me, it was true! The greed for promotion and decoration continued; and the general feeling amongst the civilian helpers was that they were being exploited for others' benefit. We were told so, indeed—told that as the Army was not our ultimate career we ought to be prepared to act as stepping-stones for serving soldiers, who pinched our ideas and presented them as their own.

The Admiralty gave me a commission in the Royal Naval Reserve; sent me down to Devonport for an intensive training in naval gunnery; and, the extra master's ticket I had won so many years before being still operative, entitled me to count myself a first-class navigator according to Navy standards.

In England I found women and children existing sparsely

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on a very few ounces of meat per week, depriving themselves of all luxuries, suffering. I had left, in France, so-called soldiers who had not heard a shot fired and never would, eating four full flesh meals a day, fattening on white bread of the best quality, whilst London women, constantly air-raided, were making the heroic best of war-bread. There was an error somewhere. The actual fighting troops deserved all they got; the Base details were no more entitled to ameliorations than were conscientious objectors. London was a far more dangerous zone than Havre; but Havre was in the war-area and entitled to suitable consideration. Meantime, my work wasn't to criticize things as they were; it was to do my best to help the supply of food for the hungry English mouths by spiking the guns of as many enemy submarines as was possible.

So, turned out as a Naval officer, after a couple of weeks' training—and I worked hard, believe me, with the instructors bribed to stuff me like a goose whose liver was required for *pâté de foie*— I was dispatched to Newcastle to commission, not a PQ boat, but a genuine Q boat of the latest type. And I count my Q-boating service as the most attractive and unusual of any of my knocking about. The sea, whom I'd respected and tried to fight fairly, stood my good friend, as she always does to those who serve her with a single heart.

H.M.S. —— was the counter to enemy activity. Obvious war-craft of ours were carefully left alone by the U-boats, who were instructed by this time to use their torpedoes on merchant ships in preference, as every merchant ship sunk meant an added hope of starving stubborn Britain into surrender. We were losing merchant tonnage at an alarming rate in the middle of 1917; and it seemed quite on the cards that we should literally be starved into a cessation of hostilities. But if U-boats wouldn't venture near our fighting-ships, what hope was there of dealing with them? If you armed merchantmen and gave them official status as combatants, the submarine attacks would be justified. Something had to be done. The stratagem adopted dates back to the wooden

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horse of Troy; probably further back even than that. What about a warship disguised as a merchantman? asked Authority.

"Pirates!" was the answer.

"If they sail as merchantmen and fight as warships, where's the kick?" The Q-boat supplied the solution. H.M.S. —— was a merchantman's upperworks imposed on a destroyer's vitals. To look at she was an eight-hundred-ton tramp, as innocent as a vestal virgin. But get aboard her and down one of her hatches and you saw—a destroyer's engine-room, twenty-one-inch torpedo tubes cunningly hidden, four-inch guns and 12-pounders, also carefully screened, depth-charges without number, and every appliance for dealing destruction to underwater craft. This stinging viper was given to me to do with as I thought best. Certain orders had to be adhered to; but much was left to the initiative of the commanding officer. I was naturally all agog to start my work, but the ship wasn't quite built, though they were hurrying her construction forward expeditiously. Not that the men in the sheltered shipbuilding trade were overworking themselves by any means —night-shifts up at Newcastle were farces; men loafing hard and drawing double pay, with scouts out to give the alarm if foremen loomed in sight. But presently H.M.S. —— was completed and we departed on gunnery trials. It was pleasant to feel clean again, and to know there would be no more mud. The mud it was that had embittered me, I think—it was so hopeless, so inevitable. But aboard a ship was space and cleanliness, and the feeling that you could perform your job in a white shirt and kid-gloves if you so desired.

Commissioning at the same time was another Q-boat—officially known as sloops in the Navy List: the *Hibiscus,* commanded by Guy, V.C., who won his decoration as a midshipman in China during the Boxer troubles there. *Hibiscus* was sister-ship to ——; and we met her in other places under various circumstances, which may be told of in the appointed place.

To man my decoy ship I had a hundred men—drafted as

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volunteers from big ships in Scapa Flow. The Q-boat service was known, I found, as The Suicide Club. If I had understood that beforehand I might have contented myself with the Flanders mud. But it was too late to repent, anyhow; so the only thing seemed to be to make this new job interesting, both for myself and the enemy. As officers there were a Royal Navy sub, who'd been a second term cadet at Dartmouth when war was declared; two R.N.R. men, stout fellows both; a surgeon, a paymaster, and a warrant engineer. Gun-trials being made, we were instructed to proceed to Plymouth to await orders, and worked our way round the coast by night.

That first night at sea with a ship capable of sinking a battleship was a curious experience for me. I had had time to forget my sea-lore; and I'd never had any truck with a fighting-ship; but here I was, with more or less of a free hand. I'd a raw crew that I knew nothing about: not one of them had done any Q-boating at all; and I was, perhaps, the most ignorant of them all. Two items had impressed themselves on my mind: if it came to fighting I must remember to show the White Ensign—we sailed under the Red—otherwise we should deserve the fate of pirates; whatever program was followed in action, it must be something of our own compiling; for never a word of advice was given before we sailed. Anything might happen down the North Sea or in the Channel—we might even meet the German High-Seas Fleet, which issued from its concealment a great deal oftener than England knew after Jutland, judging by what I discovered at Wireless, G.H.Q.

I took my fellow-officers into conference as we trudged at economical speed along the east coast of England, wirelessing ahead for the shore lights to be shown to guide us here and there. My boyish sub was another Stringer, I found—resourceful and stout-hearted, a boy in years, a man in everything else. We evolved a working plan of action in the event of sighting trouble—and we were out to hunt trouble, remember, not to wait for it to come in search of us. We must play the defenceless merchantman's rôle for all it was worth, and lure

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any U-boat to within sure striking distance; as if we disclosed our reality and permitted him to get away with the information, every other Q-boat's value would be immediately destroyed. Our main hope of success lay in the fact that we were too paltry a bottom to waste a torpedo on, when we could be dispatched either by gunfire or bomb.

Having devised the scheme we decided that practice was necessary. The crew were mustered and allotted their parts. Certain of them would form the "Abandon ship" party; certain of them would remain behind under cover in the seemingly deserted ship, in readiness for instant action. The watchers would sleep at the guns and torpedoes; and if any depth-charge failed to drop when the lever was pulled, someone would hang for it. The signalmen were carefully instructed that, at the instant we disclosed our real character, whichever one was on duty would break the White Ensign that remained in a ball at the masthead. For the rest we were in the hands of such fates as directed the course of the war at sea.

I kept the bridge for a while as we slid down the coast; and imagination played queer tricks. Dark though it was the sea always holds a certain luminosity; and shadows showed, immediately to take the shape of U-boat conning-towers. Then we heard the unmistakable knocking thunder of a bursting torpedo. I thought to see a flash of light in the eastern distance. Some dirty work was afoot, certainly. We were supposed to adhere to the swept channel, in case of fouling mines, but the hand that had often wandered to the telegraph handles, pulled this time, and at top-speed H.M.S. —— went eastward. Presently we spotted some wreckage, that was all. Nothing more. We quested about for possible boats, for a U-boat, indeed, all hands at stations, and extra look-outs posted at every vantage-point; but beyond the wreckage there was nothing. Some other unfortunate craft had been sunk without trace, that was all, in this inhuman, insensate war. However, there was always the hope that the U-boat would return to its kill, so we affected to be a merchantman steaming towards the

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coast, going slow now, because I had realized one fact that the naval constructors had overlooked. The ostensible merchant ship that I controlled was fitted with a destroyer's propeller! Now, a destroyer's propeller differs very widely from a tramp's, in that its revolutions are quicker for the resulting speed; ten revolutions per knot being the scale. U-boats were fitted with hydrophones: I assumed that their commanders, being the pick of the German Navy, were fitted with common sense. If Fritz saw a merchant ship making a noise like a destroyer his suspicions would be immediately aroused, and he would lob a tin-fish into us without challenge, and what good would our armament be then? So we went slow.

Queer how mistakes are made! Looked at in profile, H.M.S. —— was a perfect tramp; bow on, by reason of the fineness of her lines, she was unmistakably a destroyer; and also, there was her propeller. Our constructors had in usual British fashion assumed the enemy to be unreasoning idiots! To be sure, the first Q's had been real merchant vessels adapted and armed with concealed guns; but speed was needed to deal with the menace and the average small tramp cannot get more than ten knots and an onion out of her engines at the best.

"We mustn't let them see our bow, that's all; and as far as the propeller goes, we'll have to chance our luck," was our decision.

We saw no sign of U-boat that night. At dawn, under orders, we anchored under the shelter of the land, and spent an instructive day in training the crew, all of them strangers to one another, to pull together in Q-boat fashion. Most of them were big-ship men of none-too-good character, I fear; for what commander would allow his picked men to leave him, however hard they volunteered? They had been carefully patterned to big-ship standards until their individuality was practically non-existent; but they were good material to work on—full of courage and ready for any adventure; not too

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scrupulous either—and would have made very good real pirates in another century.

There were many things to be done, for H.M.S. —— had been sent to sea as soon as her stores were aboard and before her paint was dry. But we settled down; and proceeded again at nightfall. That night there were no further alarms. Judging by experience, Q-boating savoured more of yachting than fighting: our wardroom was snug, our meals were good, and though the M.O. had forgotten to store us with wines and suchlike matters, we were none the worse for that. My cabin was palatial; in place of mud and sandbags were white enamel and polished brass; for though on deck we were ordinary, below we were high-class man-of-war.

Number One had queer ideas of the mercantile marine, though. He suggested that above deck we should appear as much like a tramp as possible. Of course, we had arranged at the outset that no more than a dozen men should ever show themselves on deck; simply because a tramp of our class wouldn't carry more than a dozen of a full crew. But Number One thought the man at the wheel ought to smoke. I explained to him that merchant-ship discipline was several degrees tighter than anything the Navy could produce, which surprised him. Navy men smoked wherever they felt inclined, when the "carry on smoking" order was given, and I myself could not imagine any merchantman smoking abaft the foremast—I'd never seen one do it, anyhow.

Nor had I seen such littered decks as my first lieutenant seemed to count necessary for our rôle: not for long, at all events. He was surprised when I insisted on a moderate smartness. I insisted on paying the enemy the compliment of possessing average intelligence; and I think I was right. For the subordinate officers of U-boats were in the main officers drawn from crack German liners; and they had the actual running of the submarines, with a regular N.O. as figurehead and disciplinarian.

In Torbay, hugging the coast pretty closely, according to

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instructions received, we had an opportunity of exercise. Two o'clock in the morning, black as the hobs of Hades, steaming easily without lights, the lookout sharply reported: "Object breaking water on starboard bow!"

The night-glasses disclosed a dim object, rounded, with a projection: obviously a submarine emerging, her conning-tower and whaleback showing. Now was a chance to see if —— would justify her existence. I rang full ahead, and sounded the alarm. It was pretty to see how the signals were answered. The abandon ship party came like charging Arabs to their boats.

"Port four-inch ready!" "Starboard four-inch ready!" "Depth-charge droppers ready, sir!" So were the torpedoes. The ship's speed jumped from ten knots to near about twenty; it was as if she'd been kicked behind. It seemed to me best to ram the U-boat, and finish the job swiftly. I admit to a watery feeling about my solar plexus as I headed fairly for the suspicious object. I held my breath ready for the crushing impact.

"Stand by to drop a depth-charge when we're over him!" I told my navigator. Nearer and nearer—unmistakably a submarine. His periscope was distinctly visible above the conning-tower. We'd heard of an enemy submarine being captured a little while before and of the discovery of a receipted bill from a Bournemouth hotel dated overnight in the commander's possession. This was probably some similar stunt: a daring man stealing ashore in search of information.

We were almost on him when I spun the wheel and shaved his taffrail, with our exhaust water bathing him. No U-boat, merely an anchored trawler, and a friend! He had swung his broadside towards us and revealed himself for what he was. I doubt if he ever knew how close a call he'd had! Half a minute more must have seen our bow ripping through his plates. No one to blame, of course—one of the hazards of war. We passed on, looking back, I was almost tempted to charge him again—end-on he showed as a perfect submarine. But I sidled alongside him slowly and sent my Number One

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aboard to investigate. A harmless trawler, right enough—annoyed at having his rest broken; and his people couldn't understand this invasion by inquirers out of naval uniform. They seemed to think, indeed, that we were Germans ourselves. Of course we weren't wearing uniform—we looked like a gang of seedy tramps. We'd disguised ourselves with as honest a thoroughness as had the actor who blacked himself all over in order to play Othello!

But without further mischance we reached Plymouth, and were ordered to Falmouth to join a convoy then collecting for the Mediterranean and the East. The convoy system was just then newly in force. I doubt whether I approved of it; I know most of the merchantmen I spoke to didn't. There's always a loophole for trouble, and with the scheme so new, certain of the Brass Hats forgot little details. It was no uncommon thing for fifteen or sixteen twelve-knot ships, big and rich, to be handicapped by the inclusion of one seven-knotter. That meant the highest speed of the combined convoy was seven knots, of course—the pace of the slowest unit; and every lessening of speed meant an increased vulnerability. The merchantmen railed at this; and they railed at the Admiralty red-tape, too. Most of the men I questioned held to the opinion that the best way to deal with the U-boat menace was to bracket merchant ships in pairs for mutual protection, arm them with offensive guns instead of defensive, and fit them with depth-charges. Personally I think that was the soundest scheme; for as by this time our merchant craft were defensively armed aft, the enemy counted them combatant vessels, and treated them accordingly. Realizing their guns they—the enemy—attacked from below the surface with the torpedo, where guns cannot reach. Had our merchant ships been allotted full combatant rank and equipped with depth-charges, I believe we should have taken a much heavier toll of U-boats and saved very many of our most valuable merchant bottoms. But Government ordered the convoy system—and thus offered to the enemy torpedoes a vast-slow-moving target, whose approach was announced by a mighty canopy of smoke-

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cloud that could be seen for thirty miles. All the enemy needed to do was what he did. He observed the canopy of smoke, followed it at a discreet distance, overtook the convoy during the night, and waited in its track the following morning—submerged except for his periscope. Then he picked his targets, let drive his "mouldies," and dived under the convoy, where he was safe from the escort's depth-charges, as these couldn't be dropped lest our own ships' bottoms were blown in.

The S.N.O. at Falmouth showed me an interesting document when I reported and explained my position. It seems a skipper of an armed trawler had returned from patrol to report engaging and destroying an enemy submarine. He did it casually, much as he would have reported so many crans of fish to his civil employer. His trawler was fitted with a six-pounder gun of which he, in common with all of his kind, was inordinately proud. I could write a full book about the doings of these hardy trawler men, who did such magnificent work throughout the entire war.

This skipper in question, having reported, was required to send in a written account of his proceedings. I saw the paper. It read:

S.N.O., *etc., etc.*
Honoured Sir,

Have honour to submit that while trawling on patrol in position —so-and-so—trawl encountered foreign body. Trawled on. Honour to submit enemy U-boat came to surface. Submit conning-tower opened, U-boat commander came out, held up hands and called: "I surrender!" Honour to submit I answered: "No b——y fear you don't!" Submit I gave him thirty rounds from 6-pr.; he sank. No survivors.

Honour to be, sir,
Yours truly,
——(Skipper).

Which seemed to give all necessary details.

In conference with the leader of the convoy's escort, I was

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able to work out what promised to be a useful program for H.M.S. —— to follow. Whilst actually serving as one of the escort by virtue of my speed and armament, I would also play the part of decoy. The scheme worked fairly well in the event. When the convoy formed up I skirmished on its outskirts, keeping a close look-out for suspicious feathers in the water that might denote the proximity of a submarine. Seaplanes and "blimps" were equally active overhead; and the legitimate destroyers and gunboats of the escort swarmed hither and thither like flies. The big merchant bottoms as they slowly took up position offered an excellent target for any daring U-boat. There was enough "pobble" on the water to hide the tiny wake of a periscope, and close watching was necessary. However, the convoy was positioned without casualty, beyond two or three of the big vessels blundering into one another and tearing away a few rails before their masters got the hang of the zigzag orders. These zigzags were intricate things and, being set down in official language, were a little more bewildering at first than an income-tax form; though I must admit that the readiness with which the merchant service adapted itself to Navy procedure was wonderful; and within an hour or two the great convoy was monœuvring with the sweet precision of a perfect squadron of well-drilled warships.

During the hours of daylight H.M.S. —— on one flank of the convoy maintained a close watch, prepared for any emergency. But, on the edge of sunset, which, with sunrise, formed the enemy's happiest hunting-time, we developed trifling engine-trouble which caused us to lag astern somewhat. The trouble was purely fictitious; and our hope was that if a U-boat had been dogging the convoy it would naturally attack us—a sitting-shot—in preference to venturing an attack on the defended convoy. Through the night we lagged—just keeping the convoy in view, and occasionally displaying a light, as if by accident. We maintained a very careful look-out, with men at stations; but there were no alarms, and dawn found us untouched, as was the convoy. We hung astern for another hour, hoping the enemy might be tempted; but he

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came nowhere near, so we quickened speed and rejoined. The convoy presented an imposing spectacle from a distance as we hurried towards it; with the first greying of day zig-zagging had been resumed; the escorts were manœuvring precisely—too precisely, almost—and the splendid pall of smoke overhead could have been seen half round the world but for the curve. Thanks to weakly ships, the pace was six and a half knots; and certain masters of big, fast ships impatiently signalled for permission to proceed alone; but such permission was denied.

It seemed a pity: the masters were responsible to their owners for delivery of cargo, but there was nothing to be done, orders being orders.

During the outward journey H.M.S. —— played the same rôle by day and night. I took every opportunity to exercise the crew under cover of night, and devising recreation for them during the day—for they were necessarily cribbed and confined below decks for the most part—with the exception of the few allowed to represent the men on watch. I also offered a reward of five pounds sterling to the man who first sighted an enemy submarine, if we engaged said submarine; that made all hands very keen.

I badly wanted to see how the scheme would work out in practice; going through the dummy motions of an attack was all very well; but my experience went to show there was usually a hitch when it came to the real thing. I determined to experiment. The ship's guns were hidden behind dropping doors; the jerk of a lever would cause these steel plates to fall outward on loose hinges; and give the guns full play. Similarly with the torpedo-tubes. Most of the armament could be controlled either from the open bridge or from a cunning conning-tower behind the engine-room trunk. This conning-tower was fitted with a periscope disguised as a ventilator, giving an all-round view; and in the event of the real thing coming, and the crew ostensibly abandoning ship, we should take post in this conning-tower and from there watch the enemy and fight when the occasion arose.

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Two hours before dawn on the third night out, I took Number One into confidence and decided on a dummy run. The ship was asleep—the gun-crews in hammocks by their guns; only the skeleton deck-watch awake. I rang the alarm without warning, and the engines to full speed. In ten seconds the ship was ready for action—as timed by the deck-watch—a heartening display.

"Target red nine-o; speed seventeen, deflection five—down ports!" was the order.

The bulwark doors crashed down—at least, three of them did; the fourth stuck hopelessly, thanks to liberal smearings of Navy paint. The torpedo-ports jammed altogether. The gun-port that refused duty was the one that would have been most necessary had it been real action! I went down to the gun-positions, found the guns swung out and everything ready—firing-tubes in breeches, ready-for-use ammunition in the passer's hands. Half a dozen eager look-outs were seeing submarines; the gunlayers were itching to pull their triggers. The men were more efficient than the ship, as keen as mustard; and the surprise to me is that they didn't loose off their bundoops of their own accord. However, discipline's bonds held good—lacking the word: "Open fire!" the armament was mute. I explained matters to the men, who seemed disgruntled; and turned all hands to secure and get the jammed ports in working order. This required some doing, actually the cutting away of two-inch thick steel bars in one case; a detail overlooked by the rushed shipbuilders; but before dawn the gadgets were smoothly working; and I thanked my stars for the impulse that had prompted me to make the test.

Before the last detail had been secured the lookout reported a periscope's feather visible to port. The speed had already been slowed to normal; I slowed still more and waited, all of us hoping for attack, I think; because the ship was such a considerable weapon that it did not occur to us we might be sunk ourselves before an opportunity occurred for firing a shot. We wanted to sink a U-boat badly; because we'd

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heard and seen so much evidence concerning their dirtiness. Even after the lapse of years I discover little to commend in the work of the German submarines, beyond the sterling gallantry of their crews—for they were gallant; none may fairly deny that; though their orders compelled them to sully their gallantry with foul excesses. They took their underwater craft everywhere, with the knowledge that the hand of every man was against them, and that they were liable to be destroyed wherever encountered, by fair means or foul.

It occurred to me that chance was standing our friend if we were actually to be attacked immediately after proving ourselves in readiness. The thought naturally occurred, however, that the submarine might have been on the surface during our dummy-run and contrived to penetrate our disguise, in which event he would certainly not attack on the surface, but let drive a torpedo without taking any chances. It was impossible to see anything beyond a tiny ripple that might have been a periscope's wake or a tide-rip, or even a bit of flotsam causing water to break about it. We were keyed up to such a pitch that any floating thing could be imagined as a periscope. But we waited, slugging along at a leisurely seven knots or thereabouts, as if we'd seen nothing. No bulk broke water, the ripple persisted, that was all. Then a distant track showed—apparently a torpedo heading straight for us. One acted on instinct in such a moment, for the course of that tin fish was aimed for our four-inch magazine immediately below my cabin and the bridge. A quick jerk of the wheel spun the ship round to face the menace—the track ran parallel now; the shot had missed. Fortunately H.M.S. —— was as handy as a cat on her helm. It must be remembered that the world was black-dark during this tenseness—with only a semi-sheen on certain patches of the calm sea. The question in my inexperienced mind was: what would a defenceless merchant ship do in such circumstances? Number One was anxious to quicken speed and drop a diamond of depth-charges in hope of bringing the U-boat to the surface, where he could be demolished by gun-fire; but merchant ships didn't carry

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depth-charges; and if we didn't bag the enemy we disclosed our disguise, and lost whatever ultimate hope of success we might have.

The position was difficult; for the men were Navy men, whose instinct it was to attack, not run away. My own feeling was that I'd like to sink the U-boat, and chance the luck; but—there were other ships of similar pattern to ours in commission; and precipitate action on our part jeopardized their futures. Quite a lot to think about in quick seconds! I decided to carry on as if nothing had happened, and hope for the submarine to show himself. Even if he did, it meant quick work, for he could submerge again in twenty-five seconds, during which interval we had so to disable him that he would have to fight it out to a finish.

So we kept on our course, tingling; expecting every second to feel the ship burst apart to the bidding of another mouldy. On the edge of dawn we sighted the convoy many miles ahead; and as we must needs disclose our speed by hurrying after the ships, I decided that the expenditure of a couple of depth-charges was justified by our suspicions. There were now no actual ripples visible; but there was a feeling—like the road-sense that a motorist understands—which said submarines were about. Then a ripple showed. It might have been a fish—as the torpedo-track we'd thought to see might have been nothing more deadly than a leaping porpoise—but it didn't seem like a fish. Anyhow, we kicked off the engine-link, quickened to full speed and sprinkled four depth-charges artistically—two timed to burst two hundred feet down, one at a hundred and one at fifty. They all burst beautifully; but no submarine came up. So, after waiting as long as we dared we hurried after the convoy and rejoined it, to be berated by flashed signal for our tardiness. We explained our suspicions and placated the S.O., but laid no claim to success.

During that day signals were made from the S.N.O.'s ship to the effect that greater precautions must be taken against the displaying of cabin lights through unshaded ports. At night the striking of a single incautious match might serve

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to put a cruising U-boat on the trail; just as the glow from a funnel on the smoke above might serve the same purpose. The following night came and passed, eventless. In the morning S.N.O. signalled his appreciation of the fact that no lights had been visible. One big merchantman—a Blue Funnel boat—signalled back:

"S.N.O.'s attention drawn to fact that bright light visible in his own cabin all night!" Satan, having his sin rebuked, had nothing to say.

It was not until after passing Gibraltar, where the convoy halted for a brief period, that H.M.S. —— had opportunity to account for her existence. In Gibraltar we discovered the first relays of the U.S. Navy, working on escort duty; and there was ill-feeling already between our matlows and the Yankees. Yankee light craft, as soon as it was understood the States were embroiled and would eventually come into the war, had been carefully trained in anti-submarine warfare; and their people were inclined to assume the attitude: "Stand aside, and we'll show you how to make a proper job of it!" Probably they had a lot on their side, for they tackled the work enthusiastically, and with single purpose; whereas our own "Q" boats were for the most part, handed over to the command of big-ship men who knew nothing of smallship work, and who lacked imagination. There is no doubt about it that, with one or two exceptions—notable in the case of Captain Campbell, V.C.—"Q" boats commanded by Reserve men did better work than those in charge of pukka R.N. men, who couldn't adapt themselves readily to the requisite conditions.

However that might be, there was ill-feeling between the two navies' personnel, as regards the lower-deck ratings; though much amity ruled between the respective ward-rooms, and whenever we of the Navy wanted stores, instead of going through the tedious program of indenting on our own dockyards, which meant waiting months for supplies, we usually cadged what we needed from the nearest U.S. ship, and found it always willing to do its best.

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But the ratings quarrelled and fought to such a pitch that leave had to be judiciously arranged, and embarking points ashore had to be widely separated and well patrolled by naval police to avoid actual bloodshed, of which there was more than a little, notwithstanding the precautions taken.

As we had been so much as a full week at sea, leave was naturally due to the lower-deck. Already the men were grumbling at the closeness of their quarters; but in view of possible spies, they might not go ashore in uniform—we had still to maintain our rôle of merchant men. They got their leave, looking like toughs and beachcombers; also, most of them got comprehensively drunk; and it astonished me to understand how lightly this offence was taken under the White Ensign. The U.S. ships were bone-dry already, and their crews seemed to play the game ashore, too, so far as I could see; but our own men, for the most part, went ashore for one purpose—to get themselves filled to the bung with whatever liquor was available. In mufti, Number One, the surgeon and myself went ashore and crossed Neutral Ground into Spain, as Number One had not yet visited a foreign country. We sat down in a café in La Linea and discovered that our immediate neighbours were Germans living freely and undisguised! It was a strange sensation, I must admit —to have the enemy at our finger-tips, so to say, and yet be held powerless by reason of the neutral ground on which we were!

Number One wanted to see a bull-fight; but as it wasn't Sunday, no bull-fight offered; so we compromised with a dinner ashore at a decent Gibraltar hotel, where we made the acquaintance of a friendly Rock Scorpion waiter, who remembered us for a long time afterwards. Number One relished walnuts and port; Charles, the waiter, fetched walnuts specially for us. When we dined there again, after a lapse of many months, he chucklingly produced walnuts as soon as we seated ourselves.

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CHAPTER XXIV

ACTION STATIONS

SENT to Bizerta, a promising refuge port near old Carthage, we were ordered to act as escort to an eastbound convoy assembled there; and with the new S.N.O. arranged to play our previous rôle. Passing over several eventless days—though each day had its minor adventure, needless to say—we come to a stark, black night south of Crete, with the majestic convoy darkly and silently bound for Port Said. Enemy submarines were terribly active in the Mediterranean at that juncture, for our stoutest bottoms were using that route to feed England; and the convoys assembled at Port Said and Bizerta were gigantic affairs, numbering as many as thirty ships on occasion.

In accordance with practice, we had slugged astern after nightfall, and were ambling along like any lame duck. Shortly after midnight the alarm bell rang in my cabin. We always turned in all-standing, naturally enough. I got on deck as quickly as was possible, to find Number One, who had the watch, already active; with the hands at action stations and all guns loaded.

"There he is, sir!" he said, pointing. There he was—a submarine in all truth. He was almost three-parts submerged, and his conning-tower was opened. Above the soft throb of our screw we thought to hear the strains of a gramophone. Fritz would be taking advantage of the darkness to come to the surface and allow his men a breather and a little recreation.

He seemed surprisingly near, broadside on to us. He could not be a friendly submarine, because our own craft always manœuvred in company with a surface vessel; or were supposed to do so. Obviously an enemy, as obviously a sitting shot—if he hadn't seen us!

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"Better ram and sink him!" I decided. "We don't know how these gunlayers can shoot yet."

Number One wanted to try his torpedoes; but it seemed a cold-blooded business anyhow—men listening to a gramophone to be sunk without mercy. Still, they'd probably sunk many an inoffensive merchantman in equally cold blood; and this was war. Whilst we debated on the best and quickest way to dispose of him, he showed us that he was quite well aware of our presence by sending a quick shot over us. This seemed like action; it behoved us to play the real "Q" boat part. And this, for the benefit of such few unilluminated ones as may still not know the work of a mystery ship, was what we did, detail by detail.

The signal shot caused us to stop our engines. Another shot came whining as I rang the telegraphs. Something indistinguishable was shouted from the enemy craft; but we took it for an order to abandon ship forthwith; and the abandon-ship party consequently made for the prepared lifeboat, already swung out; and, getting into it, were lowered away as expeditiously as a merchant ship might be expected to do it. Instructions previously given to the petty officer masquerading as ship's captain, were that he was not to move more than eight hundred yards from the ship, so that the U-boat might be tempted down to speak him, thus bringing himself within easy point-blank range of our guns.

The boat's crew, twelve men all told—idlers for the most part—were supplied with Mills bombs, revolvers and cutlasses, so that they could make a fight for it if the parent ship were torpedoed before the submarine ran down. The petty officer in command of the boat was a stout fellow with a sense of humour. He acted his part very well if the enemy saw it—for, waiting until the boat was clear of the ship, he yelled wildly with every evidence of excitement, and then plunged overboard to swim after the retreating craft, precisely as a scared captain might be supposed to do. We others, the main fighting company, took station and waited. It being dark, the conning-tower seemed useless; myself and my navigator

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crouched down behind the bridge weather-cloths, watching events through peep-holes. Signalmen were ready at telegraphs and speaking-tubes—every gun-position was linked to the bridge. Number One went down to his torpedo flat, hoping to get a chance with his beloved mouldies. To all seeming the ship was deserted and forlorn—actually she was a live shell, ready to explode at any moment.

It was a tense moment, I admit. Anything might happen —probably the least expected. If a torpedo had come we were practically helpless to escape it, the engines being stopped. But we were seemingly too small for a torpedo to be wasted on us. Our natural hope was that the enemy would run down and attempt to put a bomb-party aboard, to sink us economically, because of our puniness. Why waste a thousand-pound torpedo on an eight-hundred-ton tramp? But he seemed uncertain as to what to do. He made away from us instead of toward us, and at a range of perhaps three thousand yards let go at us—the shell passing high above. After a short interval we lit a smoke-box forward to give him the impression that he had hit us and set us on fire. Another shell came, dangerously close to the bridge. There was no convenient dug-out to scamper into aboard H.M.S. ——. There was time in which to curse the designers who had placed the biggest magazine directly under bridge and conning-tower! There was also the sullen wash-wash of water overside, and the faint creaking of the life-boat's oars. The U-boat moved in closer, as no smoke-box answered her next shot. We had to tempt her in towards us, for she offered a very small target for night-firing. I estimated her altering distance as well as I was able, passing down ranges to the gun-positions, and wishing all the time that I'd been content with the orderly peace of Army G.H.Q. That facile imagination was cursing me again. We'd heard stories of what had already happened to crews of caught "Q" boats—they'd been treated as pirates, and had their throats slit or their brains blown out against their captors' conning-towers. The enemy considered "Q" boats as

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pirates, and not entitled to quarter of any sort. I wished I was a stolid man!

One can do a lot of confused thinking in quite a short while under such conditions as these. Another shell came whining, and missed. Since the enemy were making such poor practice at such a considerable target, what hope was there of my own men doing better? I was strongly tempted to cast off disguise forthwith and attack and get it over one way or another; but couldn't quite bring my mind to it. If the submarine got away our usefulness was ended. There were so many things to consider all at once!

But he came nearer.

"I wonder if we could hit him!" was the thought. "I wonder!" Twenty-five seconds in which to disable him, night, and distance half uncertain! Not enough guns in a broadside to throw a ladder of shells about him, either—only two; and although we could put a bracket across him, we might be whole minutes in getting the precise range. He was still dubious about us: he hesitated. He lobbed another shell, perilously near. It was more than human nature could stand.

"Down ports! Open fire—rapid independent!" Five seconds or thereabouts and the bulwarks had clattered down, the first rounds were loosed. There being no longer need for concealment, the cruiser arc was turned on him. Instructions had been that the outbreak of fire was to be accompanied by the cruiser arc being turned on to the White Ensign at our staff astern. That detail was forgotten. Anyhow, the White Ensign wasn't there—we fought the action under the Red.

He tried to submerge; but a four-inch shell plumped into his conning-tower as the gunlayers got the range. He went on firing; but we were now manœuvring at full speed with no secrets; and we must have proved an erratic target; for though shell came alarmingly near, we were not hit to speak of: only a few trimmings were snatched away.

He tried to get away on the surface; but the hit in his conning-tower must have incapacitated him in some way; he

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could only limp. Since there was always the risk of a companion hovering near—we believed they hunted in couples—it was advisable to finish the thing swiftly. It didn't take long; and it is impossible to say precisely all that happened; for the whole thing was a cameo—a swift flash, little more. Probably he tried to submerge; maybe he was sinking from our fire, because our gunlayers were fairly on the target—they couldn't miss. His conning-tower grew smaller and smaller, and offered a less satisfactory target. We asked for additional speed and went fairly for him, sounding the cease-fire as we went. There wasn't much of a crash as we rode over his whaleback—it was merely a shudder, accompanied by a dulled scream of torn metal. Straight ahead we drove, over the U-boat; out into the open sea, swung back again, with nothing in sight but our own boat and a few swirls. We picked up the boat as rapidly as we could, and quickened speed again. Swirls still showed; we dropped a couple of depth-charges to make all things seemly—and that was the end of the business so far as we were concerned. There wasn't even a bit of débris to collect as proof of what we'd done; not so much as a cap-ribbon. Her gun-crew may have been carried down in the eddies of her sinking; they may have flocked into the conning-tower; we didn't know. All we did know was that the "Q" boat game had played satisfactorily, and the enemy were deprived of one submarine at no cost to ourselves.

Mutual congratulations were exchanged; all matters were secured, the roll was called; things were readied for the next engagement—for we had no proof that we might not be again attacked within a minute—and we lit out to join the unconscious convoy. On its skirts we slugged for the rest of the night, lingering behind, making up again. I suppose the killing fever was quickened in our veins; maybe we'd satisfied ourselves that a U-boat wasn't such a terror as we'd imagined; anyhow, we hoped another would show itself. No other submarine appeared, and with the dawn we were able to signal to S.O. escort that we'd engaged and sunk an enemy sub-

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marine without loss. We added that there were no survivors. If there had been we should have profited to the extent of securing decorations; but the Base officials wanted concrete proof. We were quite satisfied as to what we'd done; but officialdom was sceptical. Still, what did the decorations matter? We'd had a chance and we'd grasped it, and we were well pleased with ourselves.

But Number One was chagrined that he hadn't been able to use his precious torpedoes, too!

This action enabled us to discover various defects—in the ammunition supply and the communications. When in action speaking-tube orders were not heard, and the four-inch guns were not as handy as they might have been; actually most of the hitting was done by the 12-pounders. The automatic releases for the depth-charges, too, left much to be desired—after repeated failures the big water-bombs had been released by hand—but, with these exceptions, H.M.S. —— was an efficient fighting unit, and the spirit of the men was excellent. They were banded together now—working into each other's hands; all their thoughts concentrated on a common focus. One way and another we were very well pleased with ourselves and our ship.

Without further incident we reached Port Said, and brought our convoy to rest without having lost a single keel.

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CHAPTER XXV

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

SPACE does not permit a detailed description of H.M.S. ——'s other anti-submarine activities. Probably we were fortunate in having this single opportunity to express ourselves: many similar craft went through their commissions without so much as espying a periscope's feather.

To be sure, we were not idle; and we were constantly vigilant; hunting trouble to the best of our ability. We hoped and prayed—and pulled strings to bring it about, what's more —that we might be detached from convoy work and allowed to act independently, for we devised many secret schemes for the enemy's undoing; but individual enterprise was somewhat frowned upon, we found. We had an idea of searching suspicious corners of the Mediterranean for submarine-bases, which we knew existed; of playing the spy in a dozen different ways. With a ship of H.M.S. ——'s calibre, and with a mob of enthusiasts such as we were, much might have been done. To be sure, we should probably have lost the ship. But we weren't allowed much freedom of action: we were held under the close rule of a Base Commander without imagination. Be sure we fretted; but all the fret in the world wouldn't help.

We were told off to fire our gunnery course, and I regret to state, firing peacefully at a target, the gunlayers made but a poor showing. In action they'd hit and sunk a submarine in three minutes; but this wasn't accepted as proof of ability, and, on the showing of the trials, the ship was ordered into Malta for her crew to undergo instruction in gunnery! Red tape bound the Royal Navy, I found, even more closely than the Army or the R.F.C.! Some of us rebellious ones indeed went so far as to aver that the Navy forgot to declare war at

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all, so serenely placid and unperturbed was existence at Malta, with a retired admiral in charge of our destinies—one of those lovely old martinets who had been summoned from his decent retirement at Bath to assume combatant rank as Commodore R.N.R. and handle problems that differed in some wise from the problems of Trafalgar. This venerable gentleman wept over our upper-deck dishevelment when he inspected us; but smiled again when he passed below and saw us in a vivid blaze of white enamel—I'd used Masonic influence with the dockyard storekeepers to get the eyewash paint!—and polished brass.

"Ah! something like a King's ship!" he declared. But if we, as a "Q" boat, had been held up by a German warship, and our below-decks perfection seen, all of us must have paid the price of piracy.

One way and another we soon sickened of Malta. There was too much spit and polish about it all and far too little war. It gave the impression of languor and the gracious calm of cathedral closes—as though a perpetual sirocco were blowing and enervating all naval details. We were glad to get away to convoy work again, since we weren't permitted to make an individual, trouble-seeking cruise.

Matters were going badly with the Allies, we heard. The disaster on the Piave had occurred; the obliteration of our own Fifth Army in Flanders; the great German push towards Paris. The sinkings of our merchant ships were enormous—hundreds of thousands of tons per week were going to the bottom. Britain was being starved into surrender; but in the Mediterranean war-bases nothing appeared to be happening out of the ordinary.

Here and there, in our moving to and fro, we encountered other "Q" boats, and exchanged experiences. We came across a man who knew the whole truth concerning the *Barralong* —that "Q" ship which was anathema maranatha to all Germans—when she was concerned in sinking the U-boat that torpedoed the *Arabic,* and that was blamed for what the crew of an American cattle-ship did to the survivors of the U-boat

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—details of which had better not be mentioned here, for war at sea was grim when it came to interchange of blows. I was told, too, by merchant captains, who rather sought me out to air their grievances against stiff-necked authority, that they had been stopped by enemy submarines and offered freedom if they could disclose the whereabouts of the *Barralong*—which they couldn't do, as she was on a different beat under a changed name.

We entertained in our wardroom a man who'd been with Captain Campbell, V.C., in his most desperate actions.

All sorts and conditions we met, and all had a grouse at the prehistoric, red-tapey methods of war-making by the Lords of the Admiralty. We were back in the flint and steel ages. There was more joy over a well-painted ship than over a dozen sunken submarines! Why didn't somebody do something? The only naval people who were accounting for their existence were the trawlers—the mine-sweepers and the submarine-chasers—and the "Q" boats—that meant, in the main, the R.N.R. The big ships were carrying on as in peace-time, and the whole shooting-match was a ghastly farce! Things weren't as bad as we said they were, of course; but they seemed to be. There were gala nights at the Opera at Malta; many recreations. Yes, we were glad to get away to sea again, with a further chance of work.

So we went to sea, and spent various months in protecting merchant craft, and little enough excitement in all.

Still, we had the feeling that we were protecting the country's commerce to some extent, because the convoys we were attached to didn't lose many keels. One sunset hour, however, in the Malta Channel, saw a big Blue Funnel boat sent down the Locker, by a torpedo fired from an unseen source that crossed our bows less than a hundred fathoms ahead. It was the watch that I customarily stood myself—as being the one most likely to witness U-boat activity—and my leading signalman, an extremely able man, who afterwards qualified for officer rank in the mercantile marine, sniffing the air, said it seemed the sort of an evening for tin-fish pleasantries. The

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air was calm and the sea was like oil. There was a ripple—porpoises undoubtedly. Yes, we saw them leaping gaily. More ripples; and then——

"Hi!" That feather was too lance-straight for any porpoise's wake. We rang to full speed ahead and to action stations; charged hell-belt for the origination of the feather, dropped a diamond of depth-charges. There was not so much as a periscope to be seen. Before our first depth-charge exploded there was a sharp crack like gunfire, a flash of flame, and the big Blue Funneller dropped astern of her line. We buzzed about looking for the U-boat; failed to find it. She must have fired into the brown of the magnificent convoy; as it was, her torpedo nearly missed the lot, but, catching the sternpost of the Blue Funneller, blew it out and caused her to sink within eight minutes, fortunately without loss of life, as the stand-by ship took all her people off in excellent shape. We went on dropping depth-charges like confetti at a wedding, but all result obtained was a smear of oil on the sea, which might have meant much or little, for the enemy submarine people had a trick of squirting thick oil through a vent as soon as a depth-charge was dropped, to give the impression of a hit and cause a cessation of hostilities. The bulk of the convoy passed on, and during that trip there were no more casualties.

Our numerous men were somewhat hard-set for recreation, many of them in a narrow space, further cramped because of the much room occupied by our varied war-engines. Had it been the Army we should have organized a pierrot troupe, but we found the Navy man singularly disinclined for such recreation. He spent most of his time in sleep—his capacity for rest being unlimited—and his dog-watches in playing auction bridge. It was quaint to see four solemn matlows seated at a messtable, playing bridge with the keen purposefulness of women club members! Nor was it possible to give them much physical drill, because the deck-space was limited; but when in port we made them swim a lot and we had practically no illness.

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Proceeding from Gibraltar to Bizerta and Malta, without a convoy for once, we enjoyed a proper thrill. It should be understood that General Naval Orders, when wirelessed from Malta, were sent out in strict rotation as they were received —whether detail routine orders or operation instructions.

Far enough away from land, in mid-sea, one pleasant morning, the signalman laid two consecutive orders into my hand. The first read: "Look out, all ships; the *Goeben* is out!" The second read: "Bow ties will be worn at the Opera to-night!" So far so good—the juxtaposition was quaint, and we grew ribald over it—Nero fiddling whilst Rome burned, sort of thing; but there was the outstanding fact that the powerful battlecruiser *Goeben* was at length at large; and she was, so far as we were aware, the most powerful fighting ship in the entire Mediterranean, carrying plenty of 13.5-inch guns and possessed of high speed. H.M.S. —— seemed very small and feeble by comparison.

We realized that the *Goeben* would probably make a spectacular raid so long as she had the run of her teeth. She had practically all the Mediterranean as a playground; and if she acted up to the usual Hunnish program, she would sink everything afloat, shell every available port and generally run amok like a mad Malay.

"What are we going to do if she happens on us?" was our natural thought. All the bow ties ever worn at all the operas in the world wouldn't save our skins. Scurry for port with our tail between our legs? Port seemed a long way off—we were midway between two.

"Best carry on and trust to the standing luck of the Navy," we decided, and did so.

"You know, if we played this 'Q' boat act, we might bag the blighter," said Number One, when he and I were in conference. "We could get two mouldies into him, and perhaps four, before he spitchered us." I believe this nineteen-year-old child would have welcomed the opportunity of testing his precious torpedoes against even the mammoth battle-cruiser!

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We trifled with a plan of action. If the *Goeben* did hold us up, we'd play the customary rôle—abandon ship, and take care to point our craft's bows towards the German, so that we could whang in the tin fish when he came near enough for them to hit. Then we could at all events keep on firing with the four-inch guns until we were blown out of the water.

No other news came through as we trudged along at our economical speed. The sea looked very big and very lonely.

"Smoke on the starboard bow!" snapped the crow's-nest lookout during the afternoon. We were more on edge than ever we'd been, I think.

"What sort of smoke?"

"Looks like a three-funneller, sir—maybe four!"

"The *Goeben!*" we decided automatically. "Ring to action stations!" It was done.

"You can count on the mouldies, anyway," said Number One, hurrying to his torpedo flat. He was as excited and pleased as if we were off for holidays. We departed in no wise from our usual program, quickening speed a little, that was all; probably with an idea of getting it over quickly. Never had H.M.S. —— seemed so trivial. Mentally I compared our four-inch guns with the *Goeben's* 13.5's; they seemed like peashooters! The 12-pounders were negligible, and all the depth-charges in the world wouldn't avail us. But my navigator had a bright idea.

"If we set all the depth-charges to explode at fifty feet depth," he said, "and he sinks us—if we can creep in near enough and the depth-charges all go off together, we might crack him open." We were to die with a sting in our tail! But it seemed extremely sound; so the charge-fuses were set to explode at fifty feet. I tried to plan out the entire proceeding. The big ship hung hull-down below the horizon all this time, not revealing his hull—this seemed a more ominous sign than usual. Waiting was somewhat trying—the mind pictured so many unpleasant things happening. We should not have been surprised at any moment to hear a long-range

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shell come over us; we'd have counted ourselves lucky if we had *heard* it, for we knew that German naval gunnery, in so far as big ships were concerned, was precise.

Well, there seemed just the one thing to do—decoy the fellow near, lump in a couple of mouldies, break the White Ensign and go down fighting with our popguns. Then the stranger showed himself—a Messageries Maritime transport from Phillipeville to Marseilles, by the signs; and all our fears were groundless. Still, whilst it lasted, it was somewhat breathless.

Later, I met the commander of one of our armoured cruisers who had been detailed to hold the *Goeben* back, after she'd sunk the *Raglan* where she lay at anchor. This man's cruiser carried a dozen six-inch guns, and judging by what I was told, her people felt even lonelier than we did. But the *Goeben* did her damage and got back to port and we never saw her. She created something of a stir at Port Said, and the guardship left for Port Sudan, I think, as she must have been blown to scrap with a broadside.

Whenever we voyaged from Bizerta to Malta alone we invariably dropped a few depth charges on a certain sandbank which was believed to be the lying-up ground of a certain U-boat which we nicknamed *The White Angel,* in the hope of catching him. From Bizerta to Malta was alive with enemy underwater craft at the best of times; the spring of 1918 brought increased activity. Entire small convoys were destroyed out of hand, and the wastage was appalling. Japanese destroyers maintained a constant patrol in those waters —and Japanese destroyers were remarkably efficient. I used to admire their work and quality. I know now that at this period Japan was strongly of opinion that she had backed the wrong horse in the world war, and would probably have been glad of an excuse to throw in her lot with Germany; but whatever her politicians thought there was nothing wrong with her naval personnel. A detachment of destroyers was based on Malta, with a parent cruiser there. The destroyers were never idle. They came into port after patrol, to refuel and revictual;

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went alongside the parent ship, who supplied not only fuel and food but also a duplicate crew. One crew went to rest, the reliefs returned to the incessant patrol. There were no idle moments. Going ashore on leave in the heat of the day, the little yellow men carried slung water-bottles. When thirst afflicted them they had a ready safe means of quenching it. Our own matlows did not carry water-bottles ashore, and slaked their thirst in the drink-shops—therein lay all the difference. Liquor was the curse of the Royal Navy during the war; let any who will attempt to deny it.

Furthermore, there was much jealousy between the regular service and the reservists, both on the part of the R.N.R. and the R.N.V.R. Common talk ran: "The R.N.R. man is a sailor, the R.N.V.R. man is a gentleman; the R.N. man is neither!" Bias, of course; but the jealousy was there—the volunteers doing the real work; the regulars taking their trade easy.

I do know that an Admiral commanding a Base issued a command Order in May, 1918, to the effect that as commanders of H.M. ships were noticed to be inflicting stricter punishments on officers of the R.N.R. and R.N.V.R. than on officers of the Regular Service for similar lapses, and as much discontent was being aroused, a greater fairness must characterize court martial proceedings. I also know that orders to commanders of H.M. ships were that they must not risk their ships unnecessarily. This instruction seemed to my mind to differ from an instruction issued more than a century before: "Engage the enemy more closely!" But maybe my Lords Commissioners knew their own business best.

We of the outlaw caste—we small ship men—revelled in any story that went the rounds derogatory to the regular service, needless to say. One yarn concerned a collision between a torpedo boat commanded by an R.N.R. officer and a merchant ship. A warrant gunner, R.N., was watchkeeper aboard the gunboat when the collision occurred. It was night, and the gunboat suffered considerable damage, smashing in her bows and flooding her fore-compartments. Men were drowning down there in the dark, but the C.O. descended into the

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swirl and rescued them all—it was quite a good bit of work.

The inevitable inquiry was held: a precise board of grave and reverend dug-outs presiding. The W.O. on watch was examined, as follows:

"You are Mr. ——?"

"Yes, sir."

"Watchkeeper aboard H.M.S. ——?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were on watch when the collision took place?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do?"

"Called the commanding officer, sir."

"Exactly. What did he do?"

"Came on deck and extricated the ship from her position, sir. Then, hearing men were drowning in the fore-compartment, he went below and saved them all—seven in number."

"Excellent. Did you follow your commanding officer?"

"No, sir."

"Why?"

"I did not consider it safe, sir."

"So. But—pay attention to this question: if your commanding officer had been an officer of the Royal Navy and not the Royal Naval Reserve, would you have followed him?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! Why?"

"He would not have gone, sir." So the story went; it was probably a farrago of nonsense. But mention of a warrant officer reminds me that in my opinion, and in that of countless others, the W.O. was, and still is, the backbone of the Navy, and deserved better treatment than he got.

All this is beside the point.

Coming into Malta after a convoy, we were informed that H.M.S. —— would cease to be a "Q" boat forthwith. She was a handy, pretty ship, and was already earmarked for an admiral's yacht. She would proceed to the dockyard and rid herself of her camouflage and blossom out as a King's ship pure and simple. This was saddening news. It meant spit

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and polish and the irksome bonds of close discipline; a farewell to our half-freedom. Whilst she was being painted and scraped and burnished into Navy brightness, I heard rumours that led me to seek out one Drake—who ought to have been, and probably was, a direct descendant of that original Drake who sowed the seeds of the British Empire so notably. This Drake—Commander, R.N.R.—had been a merchant shipmaster, before he swallowed the anchor and went gold-mining in Africa. He was a born adventurer; and drifting up at Malta he formulated a scheme which met with official approval. His plan was to turn certain Italian coasting brigs into sailing "Q" boats, these craft being more likely to attract and decoy U-boats than any other kind; because a very determined effort was just then being made to cripple Italy's sea-borne trade in its entirety and so turn Italy clean out of the war.

I met Drake, and found him enthusiastic. I told him how little spit and polish appealed to me.

"Trained in sail?" he asked. I answered, "Yes."

"You're the man for me; I'll apply for you for brigs," I was told, and went away contented. Until officially appointed, however, I was retained aboard H.M.S. —— in her new guise. We were to wear uniform, all hands, and conduct ourselves in all seemliness. Our inspecting Commodore seemed to think we needed a lot of smartening up. Our work was to continue as escort, but openly, with guns exposed. All our elaborate camouflage was gone; we flew the White Ensign openly.

We proceeded under orders to intercept a convoy proceeding from Port Said to Gibraltar. We were no longer the happy-go-lucky band of brothers concerned in a desperate adventure; and much of the spirit seemed to have departed from the men as the click of rigid discipline sounded everywhere. They knew that a pukka R.N. man would soon assume command.

On joining the convoy we were instructed by the escort's S.O. that our duty was to act as first stand-by ship. That

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meant, in the event of a merchantman being torpedoed we were to be ready to salve ship or human life as the circumstances dictated. No more were to hang on the convoy's skirts and lure U-boats to their death.

It was a wonderfully fine convoy—twenty-six big ships, most of them of five thousand tons register and over, many of them twin-screwed and capable of a fourteen-knot speed. There was only one seven-knotter, as usual, and seven knots was our speed. The night of joining the convoy was eventless. An hour before dawn I assumed the watch, and saw the dawn break. Nothing happened. There had been rain during the night; morning produced a somewhat interesting sight. A heavy canopy of cloud obscured the sky, and a complete rainbow made an arch like a great gateway. Through this gateway the twenty-odd big ships came, manœuvring their zig-zags with the perfect precision of a battle-fleet. Every ship hung the Red Ensign astern, and it struck me, as I looked at the sight, that it was an excellent advertisement for the British Merchant Service, if only anyone had been there to note it. For those great bottoms were full of the wheat and cattle that were to save the street-bred folk from dying. Reckless of peril they steamed sedately, indomitably on, bearing the food for a hungered nation. The people aboard them knew that they were the potential targets for enemy submarines, not the escorting warcraft—they knew they would be singled out for attack in preference to us carrying the White Ensign; yet they went about their occasions quietly and purposefully: the spirit of my blessed merchant service throughout the whole war.

You couldn't stop them. Different folks have different opinions. Mine is, adhered to through a thousand arguments, that if credit were rightly given, the chiefest factor in the entire victory was the courage and resourcefulness of the British Mercantile Marine. Theirs was not a spectacular service; their victories were not placarded abroad; but they fed the fighters as they fed the civilians, and they ran more risk than anyone not in the merchant service knew. Never once, so

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far as knowledge goes, did one ship fail to sail or be ready to sail at the appointed time. For reward they were given a medal and a pageant—and of the latter the less said the better; for the Navy snaffled all the cream of that indifferent triumph!

Noon came that day and found the convoy still inviolate, proceeding majestically on its way, with the escort dipping and swinging ahead, on either flank and astern. I had been deputed to a position in rear. Three o'clock came: a bright day with a bit of a pobble on the sea; the sun shining vividly.

There was one of the convoy that was a bit of a favourite with me. A fine big Blue Funnel ship she was, twinscrew, monstrous. I saw the torpedo hit her; saw the upflung column of water and débris, heard the muffled knocking note of destruction. She sagged out of position. Orders were that in the event of torpedo attack the entire convoy should immediately scatter as offering a less vulnerable target. Such orders did not affect me, my instructions were to stand by. We rang to full speed and action stations and raced towards the stricken craft. A Glen liner was standing by, against orders, impelled by the age-old desire to be of service to a suffering fellow. The Blue Funneller remained afloat. The torpedo had taken her in the engine-room, completely disabling her, and killing eight Chinese of the engine-room staff. We bustled the Glen liner away, and ran H.M.S. —— alongside. The Blue Funneller's captain stood in the wing of his tilted bridge—a white-bearded man. The Chinese crew were lowering the boats and abandoning ship in a panic.

"Do you wish to abandon?" I asked, when within hail.

"No, sir. This ship will stand another torpedo yet. Will you send the crew back and stand by?" We could, and we did. A few rounds from a Lewis gun drove the deserters back hastily; we careered round the stricken ship, dropping depth-charges. We fetched up a smudge of oil, and hoped for the best; then we set to work to see what could be done. The ship was held afloat by her stout construction, although there was a hole in her side bigger than a big barn door. Her

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steering gear was out of action completely. To take her in tow ahead was out of the question. She could not be steered and her engines were scrap. But there was a way. We ran alongside and tied up with every wire and Manila rope we had, and proceeded towards Valetta. Occasionally we cast adrift to chase suspicious feathers that might have been periscopes. The chief mate of our tow came aboard us and asked permission to drop a depth-charge or fire a gun if we got into action. I went aboard and yarned with the captain, this quiet merchantman who refused to abandon his ship although torpedoed and in hazard of being torpedoed again. He was sixty-five years old; he had earned the D.S.C. for engaging enemy submarines in his unarmed ship on two occasions, ramming one and almost ramming another. And on a previous passage I had carried as passenger a twenty-two-year-old Naval officer who had besought me to use such influence as I possessed to secure him a comfortable shore berth where was no danger!

I am happy to relate that we succeeded in bringing the ship to safe haven still afloat. It was a slow task, but we were so efficiently helped by the salved vessel that our work was lightened immeasurably.

We heard afterwards that seven ships of the convoy were torpedoed that day, the enemy singling out the best. Ours was the only one to be salved.

The value of the ship and cargo was over two million pounds, for she was laden with many thousand tons of best China tea and essential oils. For a moment we had rosy dreams of salvage, but the Government guarantee to merchant shipowners was that so long as their ships sailed in convoy no salvage claims would be made, and in the result we gained not so much as a single scudo. But the reward of saving that fine ship and her fine captain was sufficient, anyhow.

After another convoy job, wherein we were attacked by night, losing two ships, my service aboard H.M.S. —— terminated, and I found myself appointed to Brig One, of the

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sailing "Q" service—Drake's Navy, as we were called. Drake himself was fitting out Brig Five; and I could have asked nothing better than to accompany him on his projected cruise; but Brig One, then at sea, needed a man, and I was chosen. I said good-bye to my previous ship, and prior to my leaving the boatswain brought what he called a little list of a few of the men who would like to follow into the brigs. Every man in the crew had appended his name! It was rather a moving episode; but as none of the men concerned were at all experienced in windjammers, their applications had, much to my regret, to be refused.

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CHAPTER XXVI

A PIRATE AT LARGE

BEYOND an experimental cruise in one of our own submarines, to try to get the emotions of those we hunted, the short spell of enforced inactivity at Malta held nothing of interest. Brig One was somewhere in the Mediterranean, but no one quite knew where. I spent most of my time in watching and helping Brig Five fit out and evolving madcap schemes with Drake for the better employment of the brigs. He was enthusiastic, and so was I; and we planned many quaint tricks, some of which we tried, with varying success.

I liked Drake, and the news of his tragic death, in Constantinople after the Armistice, shocked me considerably. He was a born pirate, and after his first cruise in Brig Five he mopped up a lot of unemployed "Q" boatmen, and planned to make a landing at Dedeagatch behind the Turkish lines, but the Armistice nipped his scheme in the bud. In every way he was an earnest adventurer, and I think the Navy might have employed one of his undoubted resourcefulness to better advantage. He was as much a rebel against spit and polish as was I, however, and so was not looked on with favour by the Tin Gods on their tin thrones. I wish luck had permitted us to sail in company; I could have served under him cheerfully, even though a separate command promised better freedom. There are certain men who must be followed, and Drake was one of them. I have met few with a greater power of inspiring blind loyalty and confidence; he was a big man, massive as a granite crag, fearless as his namesake, and owning the power of command which is granted to very few in these days. For men could follow him reasonably, not only blindly, and be assured that what he led them to was something worthy of attention.

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When the dockyard people ended work aboard Brig Five —and a notable ship she was becoming—Drake and I tried to learn Greek and Italian, because we had a scheme for landing in disguise in certain questionable ports and collecting news about enemy submarine activity, since the brigs seemed peculiarly fitted for such work. But our improving studies were interrupted by news of Brig One—she was due to reach Milo sooner or later; therefore to Milo I must go. I'd been there before in my first ship, escorting hospital ships full of nurses; and we'd beaten off a submarine on the way, although space has not permitted me to recount that minor engagement. But to get to Milo was not so easy as might be supposed. I was given passage in a sloop of the Flower class, the *Chickweed,* from Malta to Suda Bay, with instructions to get to Milo as best I could. I left excellent friends behind me in Malta and would like to give intimate details; but friendships ashore hardly enter into the category of knocking around, and adventures of the mind have no place in a record of physical freelancing.

The *Chickweed,* escorting a small convoy, decanted me at Suda Bay in Crete, and I received hospitable welcome aboard the immobile wireless cruiser there. She was only a skeleton of a ship, being ridded of all her guns so that they might be used for defensively arming merchant craft. She carried a full crew of young, able-bodied men, who seemed to think it a pity that they were required to kick their heels in the busy idleness of ship-work on a peace-time scale, whilst elderly men were being conscripted for trench-work in Flanders. But the iron-hard laws of the Navy held them there, immobile: and though the cruiser was literally incapable of taking the sea, she numbered in her complement a fully qualified navigating officer. Cynics said she had, in common with many other warships, gone aground on her own beef-bones and rumjars!

But this ship was a comfortable one, and carried a pleasant crew. Particularly did I come to admire her warrant officers, who gave me the freedom of their mess—an honour

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not conceded to all—and there I heard of the Navy from the real inside. I learnt a great deal concerning the Battle of Jutland, for example, from one who was in the engine-room during that historic encounter; and his was certainly not the story that found place in the official reports. Maybe his view was jaundiced, but it gave one seriously to think. After certain days, during which I explored the fascinating island of Crete to the best of my ability, passage was found for me aboard a dispatch boat for Milo. When I reached that place I found Brig One had called and left, heading for Suda Bay, and so there was nothing for it but to trek back to Crete as was best possible, thinking the brig was a phantom ship by reason of her very elusiveness. They tried to keep me aboard the flagship at Milo, because they needed a navigator of the first class to look after the charts of a ship that seldom went to sea, but I dodged them and literally stowed away aboard my fleet messenger with the connivance of her officers, and got clear. Aboard, on the southward run, were certain merchant captains, rescued from torpedoed ships, and their experiences were interesting to a degree. I formed a greater admiration than ever for those serving under the Red Duster. One shipmaster had been blown through the roof of his cabin by a torpedo; another had been taken prisoner and kept in a submarine for some time. His accounts of German underwater life were intriguing. The U-boat men, he said, with the exception of their ultra-Prussian commanders, were not actuated by any hatred for us; but they were terrorized into doing their fell work by unmentionable threats. There were cases, it appeared, where U-boat crews had risen on their Prussian slave-drivers, destroyed them, and, abandoning the submarines, had made their escape as best they could.

The ex-prisoner said that on a day he was called to the periscope of his imprisoning U-boat, and shown a notable British convoy zig-zagging with sweet precision in the distance, with a canopy of cloud overhead like that over a burning city.

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"Choose which two you'd like sunk," my shipmaster was told.

"I wouldn't like any of them to be sunk," he replied. "Can't you let them go?"

"Orders must be obeyed—I am to sink two ships of every convoy." My captain, at hazard, indicated two. They were torpedoed and sunk within five minutes.

Another shipmaster had the story of Captain Müller and the *Emden*. Müller was, according to the narrator's statements, the Galahad of the German Navy. He was also a humorist of an exceptional sort. Holding up one considerable ship, he boarded her, and in her master recognized an acquaintance. He saluted him cordially.

"According to orders I ought to pitch you all overboard and sink this ship," he said. "But I won't do it. She's mine, though—I give her to your wife as a present from Müller of the *Emden*."

I don't know whether such a gift holds good in law, but I tell the story for what it is worth.

And I could fill another book with similar stories—sidelights on this most amazing of wars, curious little vignettes and cameos that may never appear in print. Little flickers of human nature betraying themselves in most unlikely circumstances; revolting horrors that could not be set down, bizarre and incredible happenings that would not be believed by a critical generation and that were, none the less, strictly true. And underrunning all the yarns a slow, bitter resentment against crippling officialdom that lacked vision, that failed to realize the progress of science as applied to the greater problems of the war. Greatest of all, and most striking, was the unwilling recognition that the ruling caste had failed the land in the period of its greatest peril. Myths were exploded; men promoted to high position by reason of influential string-pulling were proved to be no better than windy bladders, inept and obstructive—and all these matters were spoken of without heat, almost without rancour, slowly

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between the pipe-puffs, but so logically and incontrovertibly that it was impossible to deny their truth.

A further wait at Suda Bay—an acquaintance with a middle-aged Frenchwoman whose experiences during the war outdid those of De Rougemont, for she was in the secret service and her immediate *métier* was to hobnob with exiled Greek Royalists—penned on the island—and elicit from them treasonable matters: and then—diving one day in regulation diving-dress to explore the bowels of a torpedoed transport, the *Minnewaska,* I was brought to the surface to be told that Brig One had reported herself within short distance of the port, and that my playtime might be counted at an end.

Next day I joined her. As the real pioneer of the Mediterranean "Q" brigs, she deserves a description, I think. She had been an Italian coastwise brigantine and registered about one hundred and twenty tons. She was about the size of a Thames barge, and a neat little ship. At Malta dockyard an enterprising naval engineer, working hand in hand with Drake, had fitted her with two 12-pounder guns on disappearing platforms actuated by counterpoises, so that the touch of a finger would bring them leaping up from concealment and lock them into firing steadiness; a depth-charge thrower that we were scared to use after one attempt, and a sixty horse-power Diesel engine. She carried a crew of thirty-five men in all, and every available corner was stowed with engines of death and destruction. The first thing I noticed on climbing aboard her was a much-riddled depth-charge lashed to the bulwarks. It looked like a colander. An enemy shrapnel shell had burst against it, without exploding it, fortunately, and it was being kept as a curiosity! Three hundred pounds of T.N.T. that might go off at a careless wink had remained unharmed by a bursting shell!

I was not, at the moment, to assume command of Brig One, for which fact, between ourselves, I was not unthankful; for the conviction had recently been growing on me that my windjammer knowledge might be a bit rusty. I made the acquaintance of Allan, one-time captain of an Irrawaddy

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Flotilla ship—a stout man with plenty of imagination and the pluck to fulfil his dreams; the navigator, and the first lieutenant whom, for the time being, I was superseding. They certainly didn't look like gentlemen holding his Majesty's commission. The brig flew the Italian flag meantime, and all her people looked like Italian tramps. Allan had a strange beard, and prided himself on his excellent camouflage, which was so consistent that even his brace-buttons were of Italian manufacture! The navigator would have been complete with hurdy-gurdy and monkey; as for the ratings—I never saw such a piratical pack. Since windjammer work is no longer a feature of Royal Navy training, there had been difficulty in securing men to man the brig, but eventually Newfoundland fishermen had been secured, and I never want or expect to sail shipmates with a better crew, as the future was to prove.

Brig One was a good weatherly craft, despite her smallness, but, with most of her hold space occupied by the guns and warlike gear, it meant close stowage for all her crew, as may be imagined. We officers had accommodation aft—a wardroom as big as a piano box served at night as sleeping quarters for myself and the navigator; and Allan had his own cabin, which looked like a shelf in a cupboard.

Allan was a glutton for work, and though the brig had recently been in action with a U-boat—that is, she had been heavily fired on by a submarine that refused to come within certain range, and that sheered off on the appearance of a Japanese destroyer—he was keen to get to sea again, after filling fresh-water tanks and securing edible stores—a few fresh vegetables, some unsalted meat and the like. I suppose I was also anxious to get to work again; anyhow, as soon as we were filled up and the men had had a run ashore, off we started generally into the blue of the Mediterranean.

It was undoubtedly close stowage, for only four of the crew were allowed to show on deck at one time, and the stink of bilge down below was somewhat overpowering. The engine room monopolized a lot of space, and the ship was rat-infested. There were also other plagues. She seemed to

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have spent her fifty years of existence in carrying manure cargoes, and all the enamel, paint and disinfectants in the world couldn't sweeten her little self. But she was a ship to sing epics about, in the event, both as regards fighting bad weather and enemy submarines.

"Only let's hope we don't meet any of the big subs," said Allan, as we sat down to supper that night—an honest, old-fashioned sailing-ship supper, cold salt beef, biscuits and pickles, for the most part—yes, including limejuice. The underboiled peas rattled on to our plates like grapeshot, and the potatoes were cooked in their jackets so that nothing should be lacking.

"Why not?" was my vainglorious question.

"Because they've got two 4.1's; and 12-pounders aren't any good against 'em unless you get the first hit in," he said gloomily. And went on to tell of his recent encounter. Then he talked of others—not romantically, but soberly. His work was to engage and sink, if possible, enemy U-boats, and he had the thing reduced to an exact science. It struck me as almost effrontery that he should contemplate tackling a modern, high-powered and heavily armed submarine with this glorified cock-boat; but he'd already accounted for one after a hammer-and-tongs fight in the real Nelson way, and believed that he might have bagged the recent one but for the untoward appearance of the Jap destroyer, which caused the enemy to submerge hastily and make himself scarce.

"Now we'll have a dummy run!" he declared when supper was over, and up we went on deck, gratefully, so far as I was concerned. It was amazing to see how those guns came up at the signal. From the time of sounding the buzzer to the time of the first trigger clicking as sign the gun had been fired, was seven seconds, no more. The ship was hove-to, the abandon-ship boat got out and away—and we had fought an imaginary action in three minutes.

"It's short and sweet when we do start, as you might savvy!" said Allan. "Like to try your hand at manœuvring her a bit?" I would—I did; and found—it was remarkable

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—all my forgotten sailing-ship lore returned with a run. It seemed to me as if the twenty intervening years had never been—that here was the old *Ravenby* once more. The brig answered every demand made on her with surpassing sweetness; and she was handy enough to climb a tree. The gentle leisureliness of her progress was a charm, for her auxiliary power was never used except when we were in action; and the soothing rustle of canvas, the soft creeping splash of water under her forefoot lulled the excited senses immeasurably.

I stayed on deck the whole blessed night out of sheer delight in this little ship, and before he went below to turn-in Allan told me the story of Brig O, the very earliest of the Mediterranean "Q's." I tell it exactly; and it might be called a tale of the impossibly possible.

Brig O wasn't exactly a "Q"—that is, she wasn't fitted with any offensive armament. She was a replica of Brig One; and the intention was that she should be fitted with guns and depth-charge throwers and let loose into the blue to destroy what she might. But as her gun-fittings were not readily obtainable, Authority devised a use for her. She was given into the charge of one Cunningham, Lieut., R.N.R., who, for push and determination, might have been a direct descendant of Blackbeard the Pirate himself, and she was instructed to act as decoy, sailing in company with one of our own submarines. The idea was that our submarine would lurk under Brig O's lee until the draggled helplessness of the brig attracted the notice of an enemy craft, which would promptly make towards her, scenting easy prey—to be engaged forthwith by the hidden E class submarine and, it was hoped, destroyed out of hand. Although the usual littered and unseemly coaster on top, Brig O was Navy-Navy underneath, with all necessary appurtenances in the way of brass plates and service gadgets. She carried a few stands of rifles, cutlasses and pistols, and a box or two of Mills bombs, relying for her real protection on the submarine. Full of hope the combination set forth. Instructions from the commander of the submarine—he being senior officer—were that, in the event of

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his engaging an enemy craft and failing to reappear after a lapse of four hours, the brig would proceed forthwith to Malta and report that disaster had overtaken our submarine. The submarine, on reappearing, would show a private recognition signal. The rest was in the hands of Allah the All-Compassionate; and V.C.'s would probably be dished out to all concerned in the adventure.

For once in a while, events marched companions with prophecies. Lurking, her conning-tower awash, under Brig O's lee, the submarine was told that an enemy submarine was heading towards the brig. Our ship immediately submerged and prepared to attack the U-boat. Brig O continued her course as if nothing had happened. What was transpiring under-water it was impossible to see or know. But four hours elapsed, and our submarine failed to reappear; consequently, acting on explicit orders, Brig O at once turned about and headed for Malta. Plodding along to the thrust of a fair wind, she continued for some little time, until a chasing submarine was reported. Brig O owned no engines; Cunningham made the private recognition signal, which was unanswered. He consequently crowded on all sail and turned the hose on his canvas to get the best possible speed out of his unarmed ship, at the same time wirelessing—like all the brigs he carried a secret wireless installation camouflaged in his rigging—to Malta that Brig O was being pursued by an enemy submarine.

The chase quickened; but very shortly Cunningham realized that escape was hopeless. Being unable to defend himself and being moreover sportsman enough to wish to keep secret the truth of these sailing "Q's," he abandoned his command, first setting her on fire, with such explosives as he could collect placed handy. At much about the time he abandoned his brig two Japanese destroyers, wirelessed from Malta, showed in sight, racing at full speed. They opened immediate fire on the submarine, which promptly submerged; the destroyers depth-charged the vicinity, collected Brig O's boats, saw that Brig O herself was gutted and sinking, and re-

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turned with speed to Malta, where they reported that, seeing an enemy submarine, they engaged and sank it, and salved the people of the brig.

Some time later our submarine limped into Valetta, and reported the following story: Being in company with Brig O, enemy submarine reported, she dived and made ready to engage. Sank enemy submarine by torpedo after lengthy manœuvres, and, returning to the surface after long immersion, sighted Brig O bound west. Followed; but to her consternation saw Brig O attacked by two enemy destroyers, which set her on fire with long-range shell; and then, sighting the E-class boat, attacked first by gunfire and afterwards by depth-charges, narrowly missing her. Our submarine submerged for safety; attempted to torpedo destroyers but was not certain of success; received various injuries and limped back to port as best she could!

And all because our own submarine failed to answer Brig O's recognition signal! Leaving out Allan's cynical comments on Navy-Navy slackness and general idiocy, Cunningham was court-martialled for losing his ship, and was honourably acquitted, but the president of the court nastily said that he would make it his special affair to see that he didn't get another ship. This because Cunningham said what he thought about the submarine's negligence, she being commanded by a Service man! And Cunningham didn't get another individual command; but he did better, for when I met him and joyed in him, he was bracketed with Commodore Young, the salvage expert, and was achieving maritime miracles in salving torpedoed and mined ships and patching them up and setting them afloat again. That same Young, who, called from his leadership of the Liverpool Salvage Association to the Admiralty, was offered a temporary commission as Lieutenant, R.N.R., and invited to control the Admiralty Salvage Section.

"What, and have every milky-mouthed two-striper R.N. bossing me about!" said Commodore Young. "Offer me an Admiral's rank and I might think about it!" They made him

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a Commodore, and were lucky to get him. The Navy was very, very conservative.

We took Brig One from Suda Bay to Zante in the Grecian Archipelago, sailing happily, training zealously every night, planning and scheming for the discomfiture of the German U-boat service, but did not meet with any adventures worth narrating, beyond being hailed by a Greek felucca, which asked us if we wished to buy petrol. The craft was stenchful of petrol when we boarded her, and was obviously in the habit of supplying enemy submarines; consequently we held up her astonished crew and with a prize crew aboard sent her into a friendly port on suspicion, but never heard her ultimate fate. We knew the enemy had endless depots and means of fuel-supply, and likely enough this was one unit. To be perfectly frank, we employed intimidation and even threats of torture—with cleaning-rods heated red in the galley-fire—in an attempt to win information from the felucca's crew as to the whereabouts of enemy craft, but the prisoners affected ignorance of any language we could speak and so we got no farther. But we had a brainwave: to put a gun aboard the felucca, man her with a skeleton crew and wait for a U-boat to come for petrol. However, our guns couldn't be shifted, and the project had to be abandoned, though we made a similar suggestion later at Suda Bay and it was acted on—an ancient piece of ordnance being lashed to a felucca with oddments of rope; and a U-boat did accost her, to receive the only shot the felucca was able to fire—for the recoil burst the temporary gun-mountings—and to be sunk unconditionally at pistol-range.

From Zante we trudged across the mouth of the Adriatic—south of the barrage established there—in hope of encountering hostile craft; but the U.S. chasers were seemingly maintaining too efficient a patrol, for we saw nothing.

I should like to write at length about these halcyon days of pleasant cruising remote from the war, and yet with its menace ever near; cruising that seemed to a large extent to take on the character of the work of the old-time buc-

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caneers, without the hideousness of modern war; but to expound at length is not permissible. I know that I seemed to renew my youth as the placid days went by—and the only jarring note of it all was the too-close proximity of the crew and the ever-constant use of the Navy adjective. Not that the Newfoundlanders were profane men; but our petty officers were Service men, with habits to correspond; and for sheer filthiness of speech and redundancy of gross obscenity, I do not think the pukka Navy lower-deck man can be equalled. The barrack-room soldier is a lily-mouthed psalm-singer by comparison.

Off Cape Passero we encountered adventure.

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CHAPTER XXVII

HAMMER AND TONGS

THE buzz of the alarm fetched me off the wardroom locker with a rush. Already Brig One was alive with activity. The roar of the blow-lamps heating up the cylinders of the oil-engine, which usually needed the best part of an hour to start-up, was the dominant note. My fighting-post was in the tiny dummy companion-way aft of the main-hatch, where was a periscope concealed in a ventilator, for my duty it was to control the fire of the two 12-pounders until they went into independent firing, after which it was the gunlayers' affair, with two officers aloft to spot the fall of shell. Exactly what had happened it wasn't immediately possible to tell. I could see from my post that the crew of the after-gun were at their stations—either on the lifting platform of the gun itself or prone on deck under cover of the bulwarks. I could see Brown, the imperturbable, who deserves a book to himself, methodically sweeping the deck, and the cook busy at the galley. But within hand's reach of Brown was a Lewis gun, and the cook had a box of Mills bombs beside his stove. I donned the life-saving waistcoat suspended in the miniature conning-tower—its pockets full of bombs; buckled a revolver about me, and took a glance through the periscope. Brig One was not quite becalmed, but nearly so; her sails occasionally flapping lifelessly. All canvas was set. According to program the navigator should be at the wheel, and Allan aft. But I could see nothing of them.

Somehow, Brig One appeared very small, and that 12-pounder under my eyes very insignificant. If the enemy carried 4.1 guns we didn't stand much more chance at a set-to than a snowflake in the Pit. I knew a sudden overwhelming longing for my natty steam "Q" boat, with her excellent

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armament, and her ability to manœuvre at twenty-one knots. It was very lonely there in the conning-tower. Through a ventilating hole in the after part I hissed:

"What is it?"

"Submarine," said Allan. "We don't know where we are yet." He had his lips to the ventilator. "He shoved up his periscope so close to the counter than Hughes could have touched it, and had a proper dekko along the deck. If he saw the chase of this after-gun he's twigged what we are; and he'll push a mouldy into us. Creep out and have a look round."

Companionship seeming desirable, I obeyed. The sea, hardly rippled, was naked. My first thought was that the navigator had probably been nodding and dreaming; but he had not. Shortly after dawn he had been astonished to see a periscope shoot up quite near—"I could have hung my hat on it!" he averred—and remain observant for breathless seconds. Owing to our low freeboard it was possible to get a perfectly clear vista of the decks—littered with old sails and casks and oddments, as any Italian coaster's might have been. The chase of the after 12-pounder, for reasons of space, lay across the gangway of the after deck on the port side when the mounting was lowered into the hold; and though it had been red-leaded, and we usually flung old sacks over it, it might have been noticed for what it was. Anyhow, there was nothing to do but carry on and await developments.

"Might as well have some cocoa," Allan thought. So we had some. Still nothing happened. Then a feather showed quite a distance away; up shot a periscope.

"He's pretty suspicious," said Allan. "Hughes, you ought to have bunged a depth-charge at him when he was near."

"Blown our own bottom out if I had," said Hughes, who seemed different, somehow. We knew why—afterwards. He was fey. He had the right of it, however; for, with the brig almost motionless, to drop a depth-charge must have been to invite our own ruin.

"Well, anyway, he's up to something," said Allan. "Wish

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he'd show his hand." Open action, as we all knew by experience, was better than an interminable suspense. The tedious, nerve-strained waiting sapped away men's courage. Not the gun-crews', however. They were joking audibly—and most of the jokes were anything but seemly. Brown, having swept the decks to his satisfaction—nothing could excite that man, who usually absented himself for three days in port to hide his comprehensive drunkenness—paced to the galley to light his pipe.

"Look *out!*" rasped Allan. It was a torpedo, coming straight for us, precisely aimed to strike us amidships. No mistaking that rippled, lance-straight line for the wake of a playful porpoise. Evidently the enemy was taking no chances; though it astonished us that he should deem so insignificant a craft worthy of the expenditure of tin fish.

"He saw that 12-pounder," gloomed Allan. We could do nothing; the engines were not yet movable; and if we had stirred our propeller we must have disclosed our real identity. The torpedo came on with aggravating slowness, so it seemed—one of the bronze-headed variety. The firers had made a mistake in crediting us with deeper draught than we possessed. It must almost have grazed our keel as it passed beneath us; we distantly saw it as it emerged on the other side. It was the closest call I've ever had, I think. We were holding our breath, awaiting the detonation; but it didn't come. We had another chance.

Obviously the enemy was as surprised as we were; and still suspicious. He pulled down his periscope and disappeared again. We were helpless, as to fire a depth-charge from the thrower was anything but safe. If the charge went two hundred yards from the ship we should be lucky; and the U-boat was fully fifteen hundred yards away. Too, as was afterwards shown, faulty fuses sometimes caused the charges to explode as they touched the water, once they were fired, and the carrier was flung back like a shell aboard the firing ship.

We waited. Presently the enemy reappeared, brought up

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his conning-tower, and lay off at a distance of some four thousand yards. He fired his gun, and the shell went through our mainsail without bursting.

"Smoke-box, Brown!" said Allan. "Stations, all of us!" Brown ignited a smoke-box, which blazed merrily; I got back to my conning-tower, creeping on hands and knees. I realized that I was expected to keep the gun-crews informed of what transpired, and did my best.

"Fritz—green five-oh. Four thousand, stationary. Deflection nil. He's firing again," I said through the voice-pipes. "Green five-oh," meant that he was bearing fifty degrees on the starboard side of the bow; he was four thousand yards distant at a computation; and as we were almost stationary no deflection need be put on the gun-sight to allow for our speed when firing. The sightsetters repeated the instructions and adjusted sights for range. The guns were loaded, of course. The second shell went very wide; the third burst overhead, and shrapnel spattered. Time-fuse stuff apparently. We set off another fire-box.

"Awa—a-ay, abandon-ship party! Back your yards first!" said Allan. Bunting had moved up the submarine's signal mast—a signal to stop and abandon. The six men detailed for the task, complied with orders, moving with the coolness of veterans. They backed the yards to stop what way the brig had—the usual precaution before lowering a boat—dropped the big boat from where it hung in the shrouds aft, piled aboard.

"Put some jeldy into it—look scared!" rapped Allan, now crouched behind the bulwarks. They fled from the ship then as if she were plague-stricken; and with much splashing got the boat a few hundred yards from the brig. Apparently Brig One was now deserted and on fire. The next move lay with the submarine. If he decided to lie off and blow us to pieces we could do nothing. I for my own part thought of Saunders, V.C., that indomitable "Q" boatman, who, flung overboard when his ship was torpedoed, swam back, laid doggo until the submarine came near and then got up a gun and sank her

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almost lonehanded. No wonder they called us The Suicide Club! I knew just how a pheasant feels when the beaters put him up.

The navigator, lying on his back beneath the wheel, was keeping the ship on something of a course. Allan, watching through knot-holes in the bulwarks, gave directions. The U-boat continued a desultory fire; one shell burst and actually set us afire forward. Brown crawled forward, set off a smoke-box, and extinguished the actual fire. He was a stout fellow. Shell began to come with greater frequency, dropping into the water dangerously near our stern. The submarine maintained his distance for the most part, though I estimated that he was slowly creeping in.

We never exactly knew what was in Hughes's mind. He muttered something, said Allan, afterwards, about things getting a bit warm, and that a smoke would be useful; and, taking a turn of the boom-sheet about the useless wheel, he crawled forward to the galley to light his pipe. Our galley, for wardroom and lower-deck alike, was a sugar-box sort of thing on deck. Hughes reached it and lit his pipe; then the shell came and burst, clean on the galley, which it destroyed. So, too, it blew poor Hughes to fragments, and wounded the cook and another man. Things were getting warm. Allan was cursing like a bargee—asking high Heaven why the swine didn't come near enough to take what was coming to him. The death of Hughes had shaken him, as it shook me; its tragic unexpectedness gave us a terrible shock. It is no good thing to see an excellent shipmate smashed to bloody gouts before your eyes. The brig's position was precarious, too, since the U-boat had got the range. The smooth condition of the water made his ship an excellent gun platform; and we were a target of some magnitude. It is possible that his range-finders knew exactly the height of our masts and our length, in order to get the correct fire-angles. He made no attempt to come much nearer, however, and so far as we could see did not signal our abandon-ship boat to close for examination.

Meantime, the smoke-boxes smoked, and the wounded men

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groaned. The natural instinct was to tend them, but that was at the moment out of the question, as at any instant I might be needed for fire-control; and the ship meant more than individuals of the crew. Brown, however, crawled to the injured men and dragged them into shelter, gave them water and applied bandages to their hurts. Judged by ordinary shore-standards the man Brown, an A.B. of the Naval Reserve, was an outcast, outside all known pales; he was a soaker when opportunity offered; his moral attitude was that of a Mormon or a Turk; but under close fire he was rather a reliable fellow, and richly deserved the D.S.M. that was afterwards awarded to him.

The U-boat ceased fire after a while, and came charging in—seemingly with the idea of tempting us to drop the veils, if there were any. It was big temptation, I know, both for Allan and myself. But we had to be sure of registering a hit within the twenty-five seconds; and we weren't sure. At about two thousand yards he stopped to observe. Maybe we could have hit him then—but we weren't certain. We waited. He turned about and ran out to four thousand and reopened fire, but had lost the range, as we were not struck. Occasionally, as we rolled slowly on the light swell, I could see our boat, alone and forlorn, five or six hundred yards away—could almost note the anxious expressions of the men in her.

"There was a Judy at Seattle——!" I heard from the after-gun. Little details remain clear in mind: the wonder if another shell would hit that perforated depth-charge and explode it, to blow the bottom out of the ship, which, unlike many "Q" boats, was not lined with cork and filled with empty barrels to give greater floatability. Another feature was that if the submarine maintained her present bearing when we opened fire, if we ever did, our fore rigging was directly in line with our after-gun and the target. Would there be time to blow the rigging away with a solid shot? That was the usual procedure to gain a clear field of fire, as a percussion shell would naturally explode near the ship if it hit such a solid thing as the rigging. And what about

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breakfast? If this thing went on much longer we should all be starving! Trifling thoughts, I grant, but they flitted through my mind as the firing recommenced. Principally was annoyance in being unable to tend the wounded. Being officially listed as a destroyer, we carried no surgeon, of course; and any surgical work required fell to the officers. A destroyer can reach a base swiftly; we couldn't; but being officially of that class, for discipline and stores, the idea of a surgeon was abhorrent to authority.

The U-boat remained aloof, occasionally firing, shell coming close, but no fresh hits being registered.

"I'm getting fed up with this," said Allan. "If he doesn't come closer soon I'm going to let drive and chance it." As though his words were magnetic, the submarine came charging towards us at good speed. Nearer and nearer. Two thousand yards; eighteen hundred. I chanted the alterations to the gun-positions, and got responses from the sight-setters, though the distances were only estimated. At fifteen hundred yards he hesitated, let drive with his gun, and the shell went through our topsail. Actually it grazed the mast, but did not explode. He may have had as many dud shells in his magazine as he had live ones, for all I know.

"Ask them if they think they can hit him!" said Allan.

"Try us—oh, try us, sir!" came from the after-gun in response.

"Up guns—open fire!" barked Allan. The response was immediate. With the holding bolts kicked out, up came the guns, the dummy cabin aft falling apart. Almost as the bolts clicked, the after-gun was loosed off, and it hit the submarine's gun fairly—a truly wonderful shot. It put it out of action. The forward gun missed at the first fire, but hit at the second. I got out of the conning-tower and up aloft like a monkey to the top, where was a better view. Allan started the engines, and we made at full clip—about six knots—for the submarine. He was hit again by our after-gun as he attempted to submerge, and remaining on the surface, he apparently

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tried to set his gun in order. He fired another torpedo, which went wide.

Great spouts of water rose up on either side of him as our rapid fire—the men were at independent fire now—bracketed him. I shouted directions: "Down two hundred!" and he was hit again. Our own men were cursing like fiends—stripped to the waist as they were they looked exactly like pirates. The gun-fire seemed likely to jerk the ship into separate timbers, but she was stoutly built, and though she leaked afterwards it was nothing the pumps could not contend with. I think we were all pretty mad, or drunk with the lust of destruction. The U-boat heeled and slowly disappeared, our guns still firing—no one thought to shout "Cease fire!" Anyhow, we'd punched him into a sieve, and his number was up. When the swells and eddies smoothed, there were three men swimming.

"Cease fire!" said Allan, and the bombardment stopped. The ensuing silence seemed weird and unnatural. The engines were stopped; there was no sound but the lapping of water and the languid flapping of the canvas. I slid down a backstay and joined Allan. We shook hands.

"Ought to be a V.C. for you," I said.

"It's a pity about Hughes!" he said, and was suddenly violently sick. Many of the men were affected the same way, once the fog of the fight was lifted. Probably my Flanders experience rendered me immune. I shouted to the boat to pick up the German survivors and then stand down toward us, and busied myself with the wounded men. Presently we had our prisoners aboard—with small room to stow them away. They were dazed and whimpering; evidently they feared they'd be slapped up against the bulwarks and shot. But, being helpless, they were no longer objects for rancour; and our fellows made much of them, baling Navy rum into them copiously, and drinking freely themselves, since Allan authorized a grog issue.

Allan came to me where I was busy. Our surgical resources

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were limited, and some knife work was necessary; we had no anæsthetics, beyond morphia in tabloids, which I caused the wounded to hold under their tongues after dosing them liberally with rum. White, petty officer, was wounded in the abdomen—he afterwards died. The other man, Bennett, had ugly flesh wounds, but when they were stitched up he seemed better; and as down below was fetid and unbearably hot, we slung him a hammock aft and ensconced him there. Then we did what was necessary in the case of poor Hughes—committing him to the sea he'd always loved greatly—and decided, in view of damage done and casualties—as well as the awkwardness of the prisoners—to make for Syracuse forthwith, which we did. Not until the wreck was cleared did we notice that the entire action had been fought under the Italian flag—our signalman had clean forgotten to break out the White Ensign. However, there was none to question our work—beyond the prisoners; and they couldn't do anything until after the war.

When I questioned them, as best I was able, they said their commander was convinced from the outset that we were a mystery ship; but that because we stood fire so well he began to think we might be what we seemed. I tried to find out if the U-boat had managed to wireless any details of the action prior to being sunk, but couldn't elicit that information. The prisoners were surly, brutalized men, and didn't appear to realize that we were a commissioned ship at all. They fancied we were a letter of marque and considered it undignified to be beaten by a pack of toughs such as we seemed!

For this action Allan was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

BLOW HIGH—BLOW LOW!

THE disposal of our casualties and prisoners was simple enough once we reached port. But owing to the rumours of spies the removals were effected in the dark; we rigidly maintained our camouflage. It was not easy; for a small brig can seem very small in port, with no fresh breezes to sweeten her; but we exercised the crew in relays. We thought we were successful, but we had a bit of a shock after being in harbour a couple of days. An enterprising Sicilian merchant pulled alongside and made an offer to charter us—that was a compliment to our disguise. We sent him to the local shipping controller, and he went away happy—being as keen on profit-making as were most of the Italians during the war.

Soon after his visit a bumboat ranged alongside, carrying an assortment of fruit and vegetables, together with a couple of sorrowful sisters, soliciting custom for a house of ill-fame ashore. They were warned off peremptorily. We had satisfied ourselves, Allan and I, by rowing round the ship at early dawn, that her disguise held good. We had taken great pains with her—there was nothing indicative of a man-of-war about her. We had even pounded at her paint outside in the way of her hatches with a cork-fender, to give the impression that cargo had been recently worked aboard her. The rigging was dishevelled, chainplates rusty and out of alignment—"Enough to make a sailor cry!" Allan said; the awning aft was a mildewed topsail supported by a broken oar, a fragment of scantling stuff and a few casual ropeyarns. Our patched, striped shirts, new from the wash tub, fluttered in the breeze.

The bumboat's people weren't satisfied. They asked questions. Our total stock of Italian was negligible; but we did our best with Spanish and varying linguas francas. I tediously explained that admittance was "proibido."

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"Para qui?" came the retort.

"No possibly come abordo!"

"Para qui?" "For which"—equalling "Why?"

"Todos los—what the devil's Italian for sailors?—you'd say 'hombres' in Spanish—oh, yes—todos los marineros malados, muy malados! Vomito, viruela! Gastados, bimeby, no!" Considering the Italian tricolour at our peak it wasn't very convincing. The principal spokeswoman, a female to dislike most cordially, and not at all a desirable, touched her coal-black hair snugly bound beneath a gay handkerchief, then pointed accusingly to the blond locks of this present writer.

"No brunetta!" she shrieked; and the boat came a little nearer, the people leaping up and down excitedly.

"Aha! Boom-boom—cannon—gotta plenty big gun, savvy? Aha, Ingleesh marineros—coule the submarino!"

"That means altering her rig and painting her again," said Allan. "Port's no place for a 'Q' boat; give me the sea every time!"

But we hoodwinked a smart British destroyer. She grazed us closely on entering Syracuse Bay. She was carrying distinguished visitors to the Mediterranean, and her dapper first lieutenant, a child not long from Dartmouth, resplendent in gold, blue and white, troubled with his authority, asked us as they passed:

"What the dickens do you mean by fouling the fairway with that stinking mud-barge? What right have you to get in the road of a King's ship? About time you left-handed Dagoes were kicked into blazes!" Later we met this youth ashore and complimented him on his zeal and lack of perspicacity.

His jaw dropped. "Honest to God, sir, you took me in; never imagined you could be a commissioned ship!"

"Hope Fritz hasn't more savvy than you, Snotty!" we told him, and bought him another refresher.

Our early square-rigged training came in handy now. We decided to alter the rig of Brig One a good deal; and we did it. Steam-trained men must have been hopelessly handi-

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capped; obviously "Q" boating was a windjammer man's job. We repaired shot-riddled sails, too, shipped a new fore topmast, and generally overhauled everything. We had cabled to our Base the news of the action, and asked for replacements of casualties, and were told to await arrivals. It was tantalizing to hang there idly, knowing that good ships were still being sunk and we inactive; and we were afraid our tight-packed crew would fret at the lack of shore-leave, but they behaved very well, and solaced themselves with auction bridge and swimming. One morning a British armed drifter reached port, and reported having spitchered a U-boat. We got her skipper aboard, since he was to be trusted, to tell his story, as we were always eager to collect information that might serve us usefully.

He was an excellent example of the North Country fisherman: one of a type that did remarkable work in the war. He had never thought of war, only of fish and horse-racing; but he adapted himself to conditions, just as the Admiralty adapted his drifter.

"I reckoned fishing could wait a bit," he said. "I'd studied fish all my life, so now I started to study submarines. A very interesting occupation."

The currents of war shifted him to the Mediterranean. He was working with a convoy when he heard the dull roar of an exploding torpedo, saw the usual column of dingy, foam-topped water rise from the side of a big ship.

"I reckoned that torpedo was fired from a certain area," he told us. "When you understand fish-tricks you get sort of familiar with U-boats. So I went to where I fancied Fritz would be and dropped a depth-charge. I knew that when he turned away from it he'd either have to go ashore—and he wouldn't risk that—or else turn on a definite course. I made for his only other course and dropped another depth-charge. He came up all right—listed a bit, his periscope all aslant. So I laid another egg pretty near and dug out. It must have ripped him wide open—it nearly split me in two, but beyond a bit of a shake we're none the worse. It did for him all right,

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because he showed up, standing on end, and he was gashed—oh, yes, gashed! But he gave my boys a chance to use that six-pounder they're so proud of—then he went down."

Our new hands arrived; we looked them over and decided they would do, though the pundits at the Base seemed to have a rum idea of what constituted "Q" boatmen. One was a stoker; another was a torpedo man. But we had a useful backing of sailing-ship men, and handed the new arrivals over to be dry-nursed. The stoker was as good as a Blue-nose inside a month. Then we slipped inconspicuously away to sea again, after bidding the S.N.O. farewell. He seemed to think we were fools for going out of port.

Further cruising about the Ægean brought us no luck. We knew there were U-boats about, because our concealed wireless was always picking up "allos"—signals that a submarine had been sighted in denoted areas.

One such came through when we were lying becalmed a hundred miles north and west of Suda Bay. For a full week we had lain there, in a spot notorious for submarines, and nothing had been seen. We'd searched hard, too—Allan and myself, for no new officer had been sent to replace Hughes; and we kept watch and watch, with the petty officers to help.

"How do we stand regarding that chap?" Allan asked; and we busied ourselves. Apparently the U-boat and ourselves were on the same spot of the Mediterranean's surface! But though we climbed the mastheads we sighted nothing. We continued hopeful, however. Every patch of floating débris, such as wisps of straw, floating packing-cases, tufts of weed, was carefully scrutinized; for we knew Fritz had a trick of utilizing odd bits of cover to camouflage his periscopes.

When we were on the edge of despair, wondering if peace had broken out without our being informed, we got a wireless from Base, advising us to try the Kithera Channel, as submarine activity was reported there. The ordinary patrols had not been able to catch the depredator, and we were advised as to our course of action. Course was consequently shaped in the notified direction; the wind light and foul, indicating a

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dry beat to windward. We tacked ship every watch and made most indifferent headway—in no wise keeping pace with our eagerness. The only redeeming feature about it was that it trained the crew in smart handling of yards and sheets. After a weary five days we happened upon some of that bad weather for which the Cretan neighbourhood is notorious. It was really bad weather: even a big ship must have felt distressed; our little cockleshell endured rough handling. A swiftly-falling glass warned us what to expect, although the normal storm-season was ended. Both Allan and myself had had much experience of bad weather the world over; and Allan particularly was well acquainted with the China seas, the natural home of the worst typhoons. Both were concerned to note that swift fall of the barometer.

"Only time I ever saw it drop so quickly we got a perisher," Allan said. But as yet there was nothing visible. The air was a bit oppressive, maybe, and the sky held a somewhat steely sheen, also there was a long, oily swell running that made Brig One tumble about like an electrified cork. There was a flat calm, without a catspaw on the sea.

We got busy securing everything likely to be shifted. Allan hadn't seen his ship in real weather; but we hoped for the best. Being wood-built she might keep reasonably dry. Her weights—the guns and ammunition, etc.—might affect her weatherly qualities, however; and the alterations made in her rigging might also prove unsatisfactory.

"Since we're not out for records, we'll shorten her down now," Allan decided; and it was done. With light canvas handed and halyards clear for running, reef-pendants were rove and reef-earrings were placed ready to hand. At dark sail was further reduced; by eight o'clock the brig was stripped for the prize-ring. I consulted the glass prior to taking over the first watch: it was down to 28′ 50″! It was pumping, too—the hand of the aneroid constantly vibrant, as if shivering with nervousness.

On deck it was very dark indeed: impossible to make out even the blackness of the canvas still spread against the inky

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sky. Until you stumbled into objects you failed to realize their presence. The feeling of unnatural oppression was stronger than ever, for, the swell having eased, there was no rolling and not even the slam of canvas or clack of chain sheet to break the ghastly silence.

"She's down to topsails and I've reefed the mainsail," Allan informed me. "She isn't steering, so you'll need to watch her when it *does* come." We talked in low voices, matching the uncanny atmosphere. It was precisely as if a taut string had been stretched to breaking-point about the ship; one felt that to speak naturally would be to snap that string and let loose some horror indescribable. Presently Allan went below. Nothing happened. I asked through the wardroom ventilator how the glass stood; Allan answered: "28′ 30″!" Then he said: "It won't be long now, Shaw—good luck!" It was a compliment to be trusted to see the start single-handed, but it was little comfort. Ten o'clock came, ten-thirty—still the brooding tautness held. The watch were feeling the strain: they dribbled half-aimlessly aft, the petty officer came with a question, asked more, hung about—speaking loudly so the watch could hear.

"We'll furl the upper topsail and balance-reef the mainsail!" I said presently. The stillness was nerve-racking! It was more to give an excuse for movement than anything else that prompted me to set them a task.

"Ay, ay, sir—torps'l halyards!" The sail rioted down and was furled; the men descended and came aft. They wanted company. Balance-reefing the mainsail meant lashing down the jaws of the gaff to the boom, close-reefing the sail, and hoisting the gaff-peak.

Before the peak halyards were belayed there was a flash of lightning, cruelly vivid. For perceptible seconds every detail of the ship was clearly revealed as if the sun had suddenly appeared in the zenith. Then a greater darkness than ever supervened. The ensuing crack of thunder was exactly as if a torpedo had exploded under our magazine. Some slashing drops of rain followed, feeling as big as oysters. The ap-

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palling blackness was a handicap; one's eyes couldn't get accustomed to it, as to ordinary darkness—it seemed furry and solid.

In the north-east quadrant suddenly showed a strange, momentary lightening of the pall. There was a distant rushing sound, too—ominous. The storm was on us before we could realize it, coming away with breathless suddenness. We had expected it from the south-west; it came from the north-east.

Even now I do not know why we weren't scuppered at the outset. Everything seemed to be happening at once, the most disconcerting thing being the helmsman's roar of "Binnacle light's out!"

The force of wind was already stunning; as if a solid body had been hurled with resistless force on the brig. One could lean against the blast without moving; to make headway against it was impossible. Men were caught and thrown and pinned against the bulwarks, incapable of movement; but vocal—oh, yes, vocal! A big wave soared up to wind'ard; it could be felt, not seen, to fall with a roar over the bulwarks and flood the decks knee-deep. Gratings crackled and smashed; something heavy carried away with a succession of jars that shook the fabric in every timber; spray flew like grapeshot, to sting the exposed flesh. To reach the wheel was an impossibility.

"Keep the wind right aft—on the back of your neck!" I howled. Faintly came the answer: "Back o' the neck, sir!" The helmsman was the same man who had asked, not a long while before, when given "By the wind" as a course, what it meant in degrees!

The helplessness was trying. It was as if one had been spun round in a great cask at lightning-speed, and then thrown like a stone from a sling into the startled bellowings of a new creation. Under-running this sensation was a relief that sail had been shortened in time—whatever happened, we couldn't be accused of bad sailorizing. Encouraged, I beat a slow way aft. At cost of lost skin and many bruises the wheel was reached.

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"Can't see a thing, sir——!" the helmsman complained.

"Then feel!" It was necessary to hold on to him by main force to make oneself audible. "You've got to keep the wind right aft—right aft—see!"

He saw. It was different from handling a steam or electric telemotor in a warmed and well-lit wheelhouse, but he saw. The ship was scurrying like a scalded cat, going possibly as fast as ever in her lengthy life, if the high-piled white ridges on either side were any proof. These were all that were visible, merging into one white menace astern, and being lost in darkness. They made a man feel very lonely. But false pride prevented me from summoning Allan. All said and done, he'd a middle watch to keep and deserved his rest.

The sheer tininess of Brig One made a keen impression now. In the whirling immensity she was a trifling toy—a chip. Could she keep ahead of the piling combers astern or would she run under? They were growing bigger and noisier; I could see their massing rush and high towering, their crashing fall, with the sprays pelting ahead of them, sluicing our afterpart like a gigantic hose. Our freeboard was perhaps four feet—very little under the circumstances. If the ship once faltered in her stride one of the big fellows would certainly overtake her and smash up everything. The after gun-house was a weak spot; if torn away nothing could prevent the whole hull filling. But to heave-to in the smother was even a greater hazard than to run. Fragments of ancient lore came back to mind.

It was the Northern hemisphere, and the proper thing to do was to run with the wind on the starboard quarter or heave-to on the port tack, in order to clear the revolving storm's centre, where was certain destruction. Right: it should be done. But the brig was swaying wildly to the up and down play of the wheel; a light in the binnacle was urgently needed. Shouting brought no answer; it was necessary to crawl for'ard, always shouting, until a Newfoundland lad appeared from under one's very feet. He supplied a remedy that I had overlooked. Stowed away in a coil of rope

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was an electric torch, used for reading wireless messages or gun-sights. The torch was placed in the binnacle hood and switched on; the helmsman, being given a course that kept the wind on the starboard quarter, was happy again and assured of success.

The ship was wild in her motions, dancing like a cork to every wave-crest, roaring noisily into every trough. None the less it was possible to keep some sort of a footing, but presently one's feet began to slip uselessly, steadying for a roll the feet slithered aimlessly this way and that. Something was thudding and crashing for'ard, too—possibly loose depth-charges! The petty officer was summoned, to express an opinion.

"Think it must be the paint-drums, sir!" It was the paint-drums; they had been jolted bodily from their lashings. We had mixed gallons and gallons of fresh paint for a new disguise—ropy green it was: quite good paint. The filthy stuff was everywhere—as if we'd been bathed in it. The decks were plastered, every rope was foul; we ourselves, reeling and sprawling, were smothered from head to foot. We slipped and slithered into grotesque embraces; and through the drumming frap of wind poignant curses bit from every direction. There seemed enough paint to give the whole civilized world two good coats! Our shivering souls seemed to have accumulated a layer, so we painfully rigged lifelines along the deck, for it was impossible to move a pace without them, and then there was really nothing to do but watch the ship and pray for day.

The watch was relieved; notwithstanding the uproar and confusion someone remembered to rouse them out. Forgotten to warn the new-comers about the paint, though—their mustering aft was a sulphurous business. Allan appeared—to slide aft like the runaway gun in Victor Hugo's book; and I realized the worth of a deep-sea training as he cursed the ship, the Mediterranean, the war and all creation, formed or void. Then, his safety-valve still hissing at intervals, he began to take professional interest in ship and weather. He agreed that

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it was blowing about a bit; he announced that his cabin had been flooded out. That was his chief worry—and he feared that bilge-water had got into his lockers. He hungered and thirsted for cocoa—piping hot, but the galley fire was out—quenched by the first sea; and the galley was in slivers.

"Best keep her running the way she is," was his decision, after everything had been explained. There was no land immediately ahead; safe open water, the Lord be thanked!

"Who'd sell a farm and go to sea—ouch!" A wave-top cut him in the teeth and left him gasping. I counted the moment propitious for going below. That wasn't as easy as it sounds. The paint had a voice in the matter. A hundred-foot deck tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, smeared with slimy paint mixed with sea water, gave an infinitely treacherous surface. The rope to which one clung was squidgy with paint, eluding the grasp. The ship poised shuddering on a watery brink—the useless fingers slid—chaos! Just as you steadied for another slide, a big sea smashed down and beat you back to your starting-point. Honest fighting in smooth water was preferable.

Down below, when harbourage was won, was neither comfort nor pleasure. Under deck the ship seemed trifling and flimsy—her timbers creaked alarmingly; the back-lash of her guns' equipoises was an unnerving sound. The shells in the racks thudded enough to make one wonder what might happen if one jumped loose on to its nose. The bilges roared and gurgled and clucked—and stank! Heavens above! how they stank! The motion was stirring up ancient sediments untouched for a score of years, perhaps. Every butt seemed to be leaking, and one wondered if the Italian builders had been conscientious workmen. I turned in on the wardroom settee all-standing, weary in body and soul; the sleep came, dead, heavy, unrefreshing, because of the fetid closeness of the hold-space, where twenty-odd men slept together. Whilst I slept the ship fought the biggest fight of her existence. It was a record gale for those waters; a China Seas' typhoon for weight of wind. At two o'clock Allan decided to heave-to; the lower

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topsail was goose-winged—and although it was little bigger than a pocket-handkerchief it required the combined efforts of the deck watch and the stand-by watch to hand it—and under this shortened rig the brig was eased up into the wind.

"I thought she'd got hers, though," said Allan, describing the operation. "I'd sent all hands to the rigging, and took the wheel myself. She shipped a sanakatowzer that nearly burst in her decks. Carried away the Abandon Ship boat, made a clean job of that. I thought she'd open out like a water-lily; but she stuck together somehow."

Three-quarters of the crew were sea-sick, though most of them had been used either to destroyers or Bank schooners. But then Brig One's movements were disturbing; like the plunges of a restive horse at the end of a rope. From sodden sleep I was aroused by—the submarine alarm!

"This puts the tin hat on everything!" was the inevitable thought. As if things weren't bad enough a U-boat must add to the merriment! I jumped into the sloshing bilge-water on the floor and made a painful way on deck. There was Fritz all right.

It was daylight—for Allan had allowed me to sleep in beyond calling time. Not the usual kind of Mediterranean daylight by any means; yellowish, this, livid and unnatural, as if Heaven's whole wrath were embodied in this one terrifying seascape. The horizon was closed in by a mist of high-blown spray, the sky dropped leadenly to meet the spiteful upthrust of the waves. Ragged water-spouts showed everywhere. Yet our eyes neglected these phenomena for the enemy submarine.

It wasn't easy to distinguish Fritz from the grey-green welter of the sea, he was so well camouflaged, but presently we got accustomed, and there he showed like a gigantic whale. Weather-cloths were rigged about the conning-tower, he was well on the surface, and seemed safe for by-and-by. We could see the big numbers on his conning-tower, even the 22 painted on the fore-and-aft deck, but no crew. We grouped about the piece; not a living soul was visible aboard her, indeed. She

was certainly not more than two thousand yards away, proceeding in an opposite direction; a big fellow, easily able to blow us out of the water.

I visited the gun-positions, found everything correct; with the men crouched in cover, and big water drenching them. If it came to an engagement one thing was certain: no records would be broken in getting up the guns, however many broken limbs and necks there might be. I reported to Allan, crouched behind the bulwarks aft.

"Isn't it just our luck, eh? Isn't it? Look at her—lively little slut! Imagine anyone shooting off a platform like this! He's got us sitting if he likes to open out on us!"

We could really do nothing. The submarine was to wind'ard of us and we were making no headway. To open fire were folly—our movements were so lively. It is doubtful if the finest gunlayer in the Navy could have registered a hit even at point-blank range. A rifleman dumped at the end of a spiral spring that was violently agitated might have made better practice at a fluttering sparrow. Of course, if Fritz closed and began to get busy we should have to fight; but meantime--the elements were imposing a truce.

"Pray God he doesn't whang a mouldy into us!" said Allan fervently. "No boats——"

There was quite a lot of the imagination to work on. But the U-boat passed us without any sign of being aware of our existence; and we drew deep sighs of thankfulness when we understood that no attack was meditated.

That gale lasted for thirty-six hours. It gathered force during the forenoon following our sighting of the U-boat, and blew so frenziedly that it tore our fragmentary topsail clean out of the ropes and sent it whirling to leeward like a great bird. We hoisted a rag of a staysail and poured out a drop of oil—threw overboard the wipings of that appalling paint—and, the standing luck of the Navy abiding with us, we came through without any real mishap.

Since much of the Mediterranean had entered our fresh-water tanks, and as, without our abandon-ship boat, we were

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unable to play our rôle, we made for Suda Bay as soon as the wind permitted; and cleaned up the wreck. After a couple of days this, the biggest of all storms, was little but a memory. Since it was on the cards that we might again meet that storm-bound submarine, we resolved on a plan of action in such event. The loss of our boat handicapped us; but it was arranged that if we were held up we would let the abandon-ship party leave in lifebelts; and this promised to be even a better lure than the boat. But the Kithera Channel gave us no hunting, although we loitered there for quite a while, partly voluntarily and partly on account of light and baffling winds. As our water supply was becoming a serious thing, we wirelessed to Suda Bay, and after dark one night, a steam drifter came out and plucked us into havenage.

The first news we got from the cruiser was that the trick with the felucca had been successful, and the questing U-boat had been bagged with one shot. There were others active, however. We were advised to try the zone between Zante and Spartivento; and, after allowing the men to run ashore, cleaning up, revictualling and watering, off we started afresh.

Allan and I were talking together in the wardroom a day or two after sighting Zante, discussing experiences. Prior to coming into "Q's" Allan had had charge of a flotilla of mine-sweeping trawlers, most of them hailing from Scots ports. Their crews, Allan held, were men who did not understand the meaning of fear.

"Before I sent the beggars off on patrol once," Allan said, "I warned them not to go within the three-mile limit of the Albanian coast. They were hostile, eh? Right oh! After they'd been gone a bit I started off in my flagship, and found the beggars sheltering under the land. One of them hailed me when I got alongside: 'Mr. Allan,' he said, 'wad ye like some eggs an' vegetables an' chickens an' fresh meat an' bread?'

"So I asked him where he'd got 'em; and he pointed to a hill three miles inside enemy territory. 'Didn't I tell you those people ashore were hostile?' I asked him.

" 'They were verra kind tae us,' he said. They'd landed,

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walked to the hill-top in their sea-boots and got all they cared to ask for!

"What did you do with them?" I wanted to know.

"What could you do with folks like that?" It was just then the alarm buzzed.

"Let's hope Fritz'll be verra kind tae us," said Allan as we made for the deck.

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CHAPTER XXIX

GOOD HUNTING

THERE he was: six thousand yards distant, on the surface, and a big chap. We were ready for him this time, though. Things were in his favour; for he was under shelter of the land to an extent; we, in more open water, were a livelier gun-platform. We went through the customary program—being well used to it by now. Fritz seemed determined to ignore us, and gave no indication of being aware of our existence.

We held on our way, trying to close the land a little to get smoother water; but we didn't do ourselves much good. Then Fritz, after deluding us into the idea that we were beneath his notice, suddenly showed his bow and came along towards us at a great clip. At 4,000 yards he opened fire. His first shot went through the boom foresail.

"Back your yards; abandon ship!" Another shell ahead of us as the party backed the yards; then a third—plunk into the abandon-ship boat, where it burst and turned us into a shambles. The game wasn't being played according to the rules! Our program was being interfered with rather sensationally, for the boat was useless. If Allan had lost his head in this crisis I doubt whether he would have been to blame; he hadn't been trained to war. Instead, he kept cool and collected.

"We'll give him a fight for it," he declared. "Carry on as if the boat had left."

In hours of ease this R.N.R. officer gave the impression of indifference to most things. He was a humourist, without any suggestion of strength of character. In action he proved a compound of armour-plate and whale-bone; able to rise to any emergency.

"He doesn't know we're a 'Q' yet," he said. "But we do. This might be a godsend!"

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Then he cursed Fritz as before, for slaughtering our men; and when the spasm had passed: "That's better; now for work!" he declared.

"What're you going to do?" I asked.

"Nothing—yet. See what the boat's like." It seemed a long way from the wheel to the damaged boat! The boat was smashed badly: two men were killed outright; four badly wounded—details are unnecessary. Modern shell-fire is very cruel. The others of the boat-crew were stunned by the burst, they cringed away. Brown, the invaluable, belaboured them with a deck-scrubber; left that job and crawled below for morphia to allay the agonies of the wounded, who were screaming; then he used his deck-scrubber to sweep up the mess that outraged his orderly Navy soul. The U-boat shelled intermittently. Her commander must have been puzzled because no boat had left us. He was undoubtedly suspicious; which made us think our previous victim had got a wireless message through before he sank. Fortunately for us the shooting was now indifferent; the state of the sea being against accurate firing; and there were no more direct hits.

Fate, however, seemed against us on this day. With an idea of drawing Fritz closer Allan decided to run away before the wind. He called to the helmsman: "Up, up!" as a steering order. Our nerves were on strain, remember. The helmsman obeyed the order—so did the captain of the after-gun. "Up guns," was the signal to engage; "Up!" was near enough. The after-gun rose on its mounting and locked into position. Allan saw what was happening before the first round was loosed off, raving like a madman because we'd given the show away without a chance of hitting. He had about thirty seconds in which to make up his mind. There was a fighting chance that Fritz hadn't seen the gun come up. The spray was flying a bit, it might blur the enemy's binoculars. Allan thought of all this in his thirty seconds. He ordered the gun to be housed again. Apparently the gun hadn't been observed, for he would otherwise have submerged, come within safe torpedoing distance, and given us a mouldy. He contented him-

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self with that aimless, inefficient gun-fire, which must have cost his government a considerable sum and injured no more of us.

Even so, we were not in enviable plight. His guns were heavier than ours; he had better powers of manœuvring; he could choose his position and method of attack; we could only dodge along like a crippled derelict. We couldn't even use our wireless to summon assistance, as our signals would have reached his receiving gear with enough strength to tell what was happening. We had opportunity to realize a "Q" boat's limitations.

"I'd like to have a few of those blasted stay-ashore R.N. blighters here!" Allan growled, when I crawled aft to discuss the situation with him. "The beggars asked me if I'd got cold feet when I asked for a four-inch gun!"

The men were fretting in their inactivity. Brig One was drifting more or less aimlessly. Ordinary "Q" boating they understood; this new position worried them. They wanted to hit back; and, stowed away as they were below, could not get a proper idea of what was going on. Allan asked me to visit the guns and explain; this I did. At the forward 12-pounder the men were under the impression that both Allan and myself were blown to pieces, and the boatswain mortally wounded. So can rumour exaggerate itself in a hundred-ton brig!

When a shell came nearer than usual we set off a smoke-box; and a splendid column of smoke went up; but this failed to tempt Fritz nearer than two thousand yards. Even at that range he moved rapidly, taking no chances. After enduring this gruelling for close on two hours, our patience wore thin; and Allan decided in consultation that we'd done enough to safeguard the brigs in general and that it was time we did something for ourselves. He consequently ordered up the guns and we opened fire.

The erratic movements of our hull made straight shooting difficult. On opening fire, I naturally went aloft to control. From the height of the topsail yard the submarine seemed very

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small and a long way off; by contrast the shot-hole in the sail over my head seemed large and near!

Seven rounds were got off rapidly. Spotting for the fall of shot was not easy, because of the ruffled sea-surface; white caps were everywhere; but I did the best I could, shouting down the firing instructions to the guns. To this day we are none of us absolutely certain that Fritz was hit. The gunlayers swore they'd registered on his hide; for myself, I saw one shell plump into the water twenty-five yards away from him; and that, allowing for the ricochet, should have hurt him; but the action was indeterminate. Fritz answered our fire, and for a while there was quite a duel: it was curious to note the thin spits of his gun's discharge, through the thrown-up spray —but presently he seemed to think he'd had enough of it, and went away on the surface at top speed. We naturally said that we'd holed him badly enough to prevent him submerging; and we hoped some of our surface patrols might come across him and end his career, for a U-boat on the surface was not nearly so sinister a problem to tackle as a U-boat submerged.

The engagement definitely broken off, Allan ordered an extra rum issue for all hands. The coxswain said it would be difficult to account for this issue—every drop of Navy grog must be meticulously apportioned. You could fire a thousand rounds or indeed lose your ship, and sustain a less searching cross-examination than if you were short one tot of grog! We thought the crew deserved a heartener, however; and to keep the accounts square we took a stone jar that had contained rum and bashed it against a stanchion. Then we told the coxswain to keep the shreds and report a jar of Navy rum broken and spilt in action! There are times when suppression of the truth saves a lot of work and trouble.

We disposed of our dead as promptly as possible, with invaluable Brown serving as undertaker, sewing the poor remains in their hammocks; for in a small compass the presence of dead shipmates had a very disheartening effect. We tended

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the wounded to the best of our ability, and made a general clearance; and then, in order to give the men something else to think about, set to work to alter our rig and appearance entirely, so that our late opponent's reports might not bring down on us immediate vengeance. We worked throughout the night, and transformed her completely; with a new coat of paint, a new rig, and even a new flag—giving her U.S. colours, made out of a ward-room tablecloth and some oddments of bunting. As before, we'd fought the action under an alien flag. Little details are so apt to be forgotten in moments of stress. Certain "Q" boat commanders took the precaution of having their concealing gunports painted on the inside with the White Ensign, so that the flag was automatically exposed as the guns came into action.

We made for Argostoli to land our wounded and secure a new boat, it being the nearest friendly port considering the direction of the wind. We had to choose our ports of refuge very carefully, of course, because so few were free from enemy spies. At Argostoli we encountered Brig Four: a later-commissioned ship, bigger than ourselves, and armed with a pretty four-inch breech-loader, and better depth-charge throwers than ours. She had put in for water and fresh provisions; and her ward-room crowd, sneaking aboard us after nightfall in proper "Q" boat fashion, declared that in their opinion enemy submarines had no existence outside the fancies of the romancers. They had been on cruise for a long time and hadn't seen a thing. We let them read our log-book—draw a veil over our exultation—and saw them turn green with envy.

"If only we had the luck—with our four-incher!" they lamented. "We could have blown that chap out of the water!" Their big gun was, according to their own accounts, the most accurate piece of ordnance ever cast.

Months later we met Brig Four again, and those cheerful men of hers were changed. They had sighted a submarine which approached them confidently on the surface of a glass-

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smooth sea, with the brig as steady as a rock. At a thousand yards Brig Four got up her guns; and the vaunted four-inch missed fire eight times; the U-boat getting away!

Still, meeting up with Brig Four showed us possibilities. Allan and Brig Four's captain got their heads together and evolved a scheme for cruising in company—two coasters offering a bigger bait than one. We were given more or less a free hand in our work—simply sent out to engage enemy submarines. If, thus cruising in company, we chanced across an enemy ship, we could turn a broadside of five guns on to him and five guns would certainly be better than two or three.

Before we could play a part in this scheme, however, we had to replace our shattered boat; and this was not an easy matter. Such as offered were altogether unsuitable for our purpose—derelict liners' life-boats for the most part, or pukka naval cutters—boats almost as big as the tiny brig itself. Either that or they were too rotten to be at all seaworthy; and the price demanded by the rapacious shore-folk would have bought the latest thing in smart motor launches complete with nickelled gadgets and silken cushions. Such boats as fitted our needs were not for sale. So we stole one —Brig Four lending us her boat to tow off our prize; and we went to sea before daylight so that our theft should not be brought home to us.

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CHAPTER XXX

BRIG FIVE

ALTHOUGH Brig Four was the later-commissioned ship, her commander was senior to Allan, according to the sacred Navy List, which is the Navy's Bible; and so that the Nelson tradition need not be injured, Brig Four's man would take command in the flotilla, although he had had no practical experience in dealing with submarines and Allan had a lot.

Our prearranged signal for opening fire in event of action was that Brig Four should hang out a red shirt—a spare one—on his main boom. Until that signal was flown we were forbidden on pain of death or worse to open up our guns. We cruised about for many days in company, meeting nothing but disappointment. Sailing alone we had met with a fair amount of luck; but Brig Four seemed to put a hoodoo on everything. We collected many "allos"; and reports that this ship and the other had been sunk; the big convoys were daily losing heavily; but from Kaso Straits to Kithera Channel and the Dora was nothing of a catchable nature.

The rumours filtering through were that Italy was doing badly; and report had it that she would soon throw in her hand and make the best terms possible with the Central Powers. That happening, our usefulness automatically ended, of course; as Italian brigs would offer no attraction for submarines.

Information regarding our own armies was disconcerting, too; though we only picked up scattered rags of news. We didn't exactly lose heart, as calamity after calamity was reported; but the tone of our discussions grew pessimistic; and our part appeared to have no real bearing on the general situation.

Still, growling wouldn't help; we exerted ourselves to keep

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the men amused and fit, and they made the best of it, whether we were lying oilily becalmed for days at a stretch or sheltering under Scarpanto from the frequent vigorous gales. For 1918 in the Mediterranean was a stormy year.

After long waiting opportunity came. Cruising in company with Brig Four a hostile submarine was reported, and we went as briskly as might be to action stations. Ignoring Brig One's tininess, the U-boat concentrated on our bigger consort; and we accordingly became spectators. Thanks to Brig Four's seniority, we were not permitted to do a thing without orders; so, with the hands in readiness for action, we were in a position to see what "Q" boating looked like from the outside.

The submarine lobbed two shells in quick succession ahead and astern of Brig Four. The big brig seemed literally enveloped in spray. She seemed helpless and sorrowful; especially when she backed her yards and lowered away her boat. We were in position to open fire with excellent chance of doing damage; but though we strained our eyes to see the striped shirt displayed, it failed to eventuate. Comparing notes afterwards, we found Brig Four had quite forgotten the signal.

Brig Four, hauling her wind to lower her boat, was well ahead on our weather bow. We ourselves, hugging the wind but moving, were naturally to leeward. The U-boat was at an angle to both of us. We were the base of a triangle of which the submarine formed the apex. Her range was about two thousand yards and she was well out of the water. Had the two brigs brought every gun to bear the submarine must have been at our mercy. C.O. Brig Four adhered closely to program, sending away the boat; the submarine fired steadily. We could see the shell fall wide. Brig Four was evidently determined to coax the enemy nearer until he could shoot to kill. He set off a smoke-box aft and fell off from the wind. In doing so he pointed his bow at us and almost ran us down.

"For God's sake, Walker, open fire—we've got him cold!" shouted Allan. But Walker carried on, and we dodged him, waiting his orders.

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The fortune of war was against us. It may be that Fritz suspected something fishy; he plastered the sea about with shell, throwing up much spray, failed to hit and then broke off the action, and, submerging, vanished from our ken.

Before we could engage real compliments with Brig Four —and Allan seemed inclined to open fire on him!—orders were wirelessed from Base instructing us to return for refit and replenishment; and Brig Four was instructed to patrol another beat. We parted company; and in course of a few days were snugly in port.

Brig One was handed over to shipwrights and riggers; and as to live aboard under such conditions was impossible, the men were drafted to barracks ashore, and we officers were permitted to find hotel accommodation in Valetta. This was no easy task, as every available room seemed to be occupied by Brass Hats; however, we found a snug backwater, and made ready to stretch our legs.

It was proposed that our little ship should be equipped with a four-inch gun in place of one of her 12-pounders; but she was so minute that it was feared the discharge of such a big piece of ordnance might burst her apart, so we were given a new depth-charge thrower that promised to be useful; for the prospects of gun-duels were growing more and more remote, as the submarines were confining themselves almost entirely to attacks from below the surface. The Naval mind was slowly —very slowly—adjusting itself to altering conditions. Guns had won Trafalgar, and it took a long time before the Nelson theories of the Royal Navy adapted themselves to the conditions of the twentieth century. In the U.S. Navy we found more enlightenment; their swarms of submarine chasers troubled not at all about guns, but confined themselves almost exclusively to depth-charges. We enthusiasts hobnobbed a lot with the U.S. men, picking their brains without shame; ready to learn anything that might help us account for our existence. Then, whilst we were in the throes of refitting, a battleship came into Valetta for refit; and as the battleship was of premier importance we were neglected, every man available be-

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ing turned over to the big fellow. Presently the battleship, polished to the *n*th degree, returned to her station—and though we tried to borrow a junior surgeon from her overfull complement, we failed. We were only a destroyer in status, and were supposed to rely for surgical aid on our parent ship—which was a stone one!

During our long cruising Brig Five, the super-brig, had been equipped and sent to sea, with Drake in command; she returned before our refit was in any wise completed, and Drake was appointed to mop up details for the projected landing at Dedeagatch. I was consequently appointed to Brig Five. Brig One was put out of commission; Allan enrolled himself under Drake for shore service; and with many of the old ratings of Brig One under me, I found myself with a good ship and more or less a free hand. By comparison with little One, Five was palatial. Each officer had a separate cabin; our ward-room was capable of holding at least six people if they packed tightly; we had a four-inch gun and two 12-pounders; and two depth-charge throwers, as well as twin engines. During her cruise, Brig Five had not sighted a single submarine! We hoped for better luck.

Brig Five was moved down to Marsa Scirocco, south of Malta, for gun-trials. The C.-in-C. came down to oversee, having never witnessed a "Q" boat in action, even pretended. I wondered how my men would acquit themselves when we put out to sea with the august presence aboard; but they did very well. The target was a six-foot square of canvas lashed to boat-hook staves fixed in a raft, with a twelve-inch bull's-eye painted in the centre. It was towed out to sea and abandoned; and I sailed Brig Five out as if on patrol. At eighteen hundred yards the order "Up guns!" was given, the whole procedure having been rehearsed; and within nine seconds two hits had been obtained in the bull—that is to say, the guns were brought up, trained and fired in that space of time. It was good shooting, considering how few of the men were professional gun-layers; and it impressed the C.-in-C., for

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he said that if Brig Five bagged a submarine she would earn and get a V.C.

So we started out in high spirits enough. The reports of submarine activity were alarming; but Fritz must have counted us too small for his attentions, for days and weeks went by without so much as a periscope being sighted. We saw plenty of wreckage—and that was distressing. Once we sighted a much-mutilated corpse, with evidence of foul murder; but the submarine seemed to have grown extinct.

Maybe we chose our beats wrongly; though we visited all those parts where most activity was reported. The Malta and Skerki Channels had won an unenviable reputation; sinkings were more frequent there than anywhere in the Mediterranean; but one natural factor militated against our success. During several months we encountered a constant succession of considerable gales, and we could not make ports at which we were aiming; consequently it is possible that periscopes, unseen by us, watched our wild careering around a triangular course without any apparent objective, and took care not to approach us too closely. Even if the enemy had shown himself Brig Five proved very lively, and our chance of successful action might have been remote.

But though we saw no submarines we encountered many, and very many, honest British merchantmen, singly or in convoy, steaming sturdily towards the besieged Motherland; indomitable. Ship by ship, line by line, they stormed past—Blue-Funnellers from the Far East, Anchor Liners from Indian ports; City Liners, Bibby boats, B.I.'s—there seemed no end to that gallant procession, and at each ship's stern showed the smoke-blackened Red Ensign as proof to all the world that the merchant service of Britain would not be confounded or confused. Not slim, ladylike liners, these; but big weight-carrying freighters, laden scupper-deep with food for a hungry land. Let there be no mistake—the merchant service won the war by its grim endurance; and many an R.N.R. officer, doomed by circumstances to tedious routine duties in idle

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battleships, counted himself traitor to his cloth in that he had not continued to serve the old Red Duster, that carried the welfare of the world under its defiant wave.

Close on 20,000 British merchant seamen rendered up their lives in the course of the war as merchant seamen pure and simple, to say nothing of the other thousands who died under the White Ensign, when the Navy stripped the humbler service of the cream of its men and brought them to more spectacular if less heroic service.

Sometimes our presence was not understood by the escort ships of various convoys, and on one occasion as we rolled and wallowed under short canvas, shipping much whole water, an important convoy sloop fussed towards us, in answer to a flag signal from the S.N.O. Convoy. We were under suspicion, and we were shown as much. A signal hoisted up the sloop's mast was accompanied by the training of her four-point-seven gun on our hull. Of course, we might have been covering a U-boat. We might have been enemy craft fitted with secret torpedo tubes, for the matter of that.

"Let's pull his leg a bit," I said to Jimmy, my Number One. "We shouldn't be expected to carry the International Code; and we're a Dago, anyway." So we looked as much like Italians as we could, and the sloop closed us, the four-seven muzzle as big as a tunnel. We thought he was about to run us down; and we saw a red-faced officer busy with a portentous megaphone. The Italian ensign was hoisted to our peak, and we went about our lawful avocations. Came a stentorian: "Brig ahoy! What ship is that?"

I funnelled my hands about my mouth and yelled something incoherent.

"Heave-to, or I'll sink you!" Three men obediently laid our yards to the mast; the sloop came ramping alongside, breathing thunderbolts.

"Who are you? What's your business?" demanded the two and a half-striper in command.

"No savvy Anglish," I replied. He repeated the demand in synthetic Italian, growing redder than before.

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"No savvy Anglish!" I returned patiently.

"For a drink I'd blow you out of the water!" he bellowed.

"Come down to the wardroom and have one then," suggested I; "Jimmy here brews the best cocktails ever!"

"Hell!" said the sloop. Then authority barked: "Why didn't you answer my signal?"

"Camouflage, blessed word! There might be a Fritz watching now—isn't that a periscope over there? Fritz knows his job even if you don't." He swung his ship away ahead of us, his propellers flurrying; and we saw everything the Navy had ever thought of the merchant service in his face. But we might have been an enemy ship, and if we had we could have got that gentleman sitting—he would simply have thrown his ship away for want of a little precaution. There isn't much imagination in the Senior Service.

We recommenced our triangular beat, and then, after enduring a month of bad weather—no two days of which would have permitted successful action—we headed for Bizerta for fresh water and food. But we ran to leeward and were compelled to beat the triangle again, navigation being tricky in close waters with strong winds for a sailing craft; finally, however, we contrived it, after club-hauling off a wicked lee-shore in genuine Marryat style. On the night we anchored in that African port a German submarine sank a French merchantman by gun-fire and torpedo within a mile of the course we'd taken to reach the mouth of the swept channel!

Our luck was obviously out; our dreams of that promised V.C. seemed likely never to prove realities.

Ashore we collected news. Matters seemed more promising for the Allied cause, we were told by an obliging S.N.O., who gave us all facilities for replenishing stocks; it was even whispered that Bulgaria was ready to sue for peace.

'It's the beginning of the end," said S.N.O. "Regular rot started amongst the enemy Powers; and you'll find Turkey and Austria will be the next to rat." This being an auspicious occasion, we of Brig Five's wardroom decided to celebrate by a Number One size dinner, after a diet of salt pork and

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beef. We sought the perfect eating-place under the S.N.O.'s directions; but there were food restrictions, and the meal failed to come up to expectations. If we'd needed our shoes blacked it would have been different. Surely there never was such a place for shoe-blacks as Bizerta; and in peace-time they must black each other's boots for a livelihood.

The East met the West and rubbed shoulders with it in Bizerta. Out of a hundred cameos one stands out vividly—a Yankee petty officer, complete in blue, white and gold, playing keen billiards with a burnoused Moor, neither understanding one another's lingo; the petty officer wearing the Moor's fez; and the Moor proud of his Boston garters! One of the quaintest towns I have ever seen, I think, this same Bizerta, with its woeful litter of torpedoed and salved ships in the harbour; and its recovering remnants of the Serbian Army ashore; and half the Foreign Legion drinking vermouth in its cafés.

In Bizerta we encountered the French conception of a "Q" boat; not an elaborate contraption at all—merely a fishing boat with a 75 field-gun on an improvised mounting, screened by a careless tarpaulin; manned by a dozen hard-case fishermen; but it already had a bag of two U-boats to its score. In our well-found Brig Five, we felt like the expensively-equipped angler who sees a boy catch the finest fish with a bent pin!

The weather broke again, and the brig dragged her moorings. We decided we'd had enough of port where no V.C.'s were to be won; and got away to sea, drawn by rumours of submarine activity in the neighbourhood of the Skerki Bank. The weather was unsuitable for naval action; but we cruised in that vicinity for many days and nights, and had no adventures, beyond narrowly escaping sinking an antique French gunboat, which, in the darkness, looked precisely like a U-boat awash. We had the guns up and trained before he made the private recognition signal; and when he passed us at close quarters we wondered even then if he were not an enemy—so like a submarine did he show. But when we hailed

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him the reply was in excellent French; and as we couldn't chase him until daylight we had to let him go. Perhaps he was a disguised submarine; even to-day I am dubious about it.

Two evenings later our wireless man reported confused signals which failed to answer to any of our codes. An enemy submarine was responsible for those signals, we decided; and we got an idea of his direction by altering course until the signals increased in strength; then we headed to that point of the compass where they were loudest. Next morning we sighted what we thought were floating oil-drums from a sunken freighter. Actually they were German mines—laid by a submarine obviously. They were fairly in the track of the Bizerta-bound convoy; but of the egg-laying U-boat we saw nothing. Our duty was plain; and, risking our camouflage, we sank and exploded the mines by rifle-fire, and broadcast a signal reporting a mine-field, in hope any stray ships would avoid the locality. After further cruising, always hopeful, we shaped course for the Base, where we were already overdue; and we were dejected men. Fritz, we declared, was far too old a bird to be caught with such chaff as we could strew.

Rumours of an impending armistice were rife when we reached Malta. We of the crew held a consultation that decided us to get to sea before peace was declared, so that we might still earn that V.C. We consequently bustled about and got away; making for Suda Bay again, where a submarine was reported.

We saw him at long last; but he saw us first and gave us a wide berth. A bit careless of consequences by this time, we called up a Base and gave his position; and two destroyers hurried out, chased and bagged him—but we didn't get the credit. Bad weather troubled us shortly afterwards; and we sheltered at Suda Bay, where news of a nearing armistice was common.

"If we stick it here we'll lose our last chance," we decided. It promised to be a race between us and the peace! We got to sea again, hopeful always; and laid a course for Cyprus.

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Two days later we fought an enemy submarine on the surface; but failing to sink him, he got away, and was not caught. It was a long-range duel in which our top-hamper suffered a good deal, but we received no casualties; and if he were hit, he showed no signs of it. We then headed again for Cyprus; but on November 11th, 1918, we picked up a wireless signal announcing the Armistice.

We ought to have returned to our Base forthwith, I know, but—our mentality, warped by disappointment, maybe, told us that if we continued we might by chance happen across a submarine that hadn't heard about peace. So we failed to answer the signal and went for a joy-cruise to the Eastern Mediterranean, and, reaching Cyprus, were welcomed with open arms by the British colony there.

The war was over, and our period of usefulness was past. We hadn't won the V.C., but we tried to pride ourselves that we'd done some little towards the winning of the great combat. Maybe we had—although Brig Five herself hadn't done much. Anyhow, I'd seen the greatest war known to the world from three dimensions, collected a monstrous stock of experiences, and made innumerable worth-while friends. Our "Q" brigs had had one good effect on the outcome of the war—so suspicious had enemy submarines become of us that practically all the Italian coastwise trade was allowed to continue unmolested; and that fact had much to do with keeping Italy in the war.

So, after delightful days in Famagusta, we bade adieu to the colony there and shaped course for Malta and the ways of peace. It took us twenty-nine days to make the passage, in the foulest sort of weather—an unbroken succession of gales from the W.N.W., and as Brig Five, though handsome, was not a good weatherly ship, we often enough thought our number was up. But one gale is much like another and calls for small description here. We reached Malta—we almost missed it!—and, mooring in Valetta Harbour, were ordered to pay off. We had been given up as lost a full week before; and our return created something of a sensation. But we paid off; the

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crew stood the ward-room a dinner, the ward-room stood the crew another—on the same night!—and there were jollifications.

I believe firmly, judging by demonstrations, that if one or two of us had stolen Brig Five and gone to sea as pirates pure and simple, we should not have lacked an enthusiastic following. The ship was ideal for the purpose; and the men liked the reckless life—they seemed indisposed to settle down again to the ordered ways of peace. But—there were duties awaiting me at home; and I consequently put in a claim for demobilization forthwith, on the score of long war service, age, and loss of ordinary professional earnings. For answer I was told to take command of *Partridge II,* due to sail for Constantinople with stores for the C.-in-C. Meantime, the Regular Navy was being drafted home for courses of study at Cambridge! The R.N.R. was being retained for mine-sweeping and suchlike housemaid's work; the pukka service must needs go and polish itself up and learn the stately ceremonial of the ages. Elderly merchantmen must work, whilst youthful Navy men were allowed to play in their own homeland.

This didn't appeal to me. I liked commanding a "Q" boat; I had no hankering to skipper a ferry-boat in peace-time. So I protested against this imposition and reiterated my request to be sent home. I was told to be aboard *Partridge II* that night!

The Commodore concerned was the man who disliked H.M.S. ——'s gunnery as narrated before—the whole business was a case of spite, pure and simple. Old-womanish spite at that—for I'd clearly explained how considerable my financial loss had been during the four and a half years of service. Spite, then, had to be fought. I sought out a tried and trusted friend in Valetta—a Navy man with a brain.

"You a Mason?" he asked, when I explained my position. I replied in the affirmative.

"Go to the hospital, then, and see ——," he advised. I did, giving a word and a sign. I was carefully vetted, pro-

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nounced fit in every detail; the situation seemed hopeless. Then the surgeon had an inspiration.

"Let me look at your teeth!" he said. Five minutes later I was reported sick, ashore. I went back to my hotel and waited. Nothing happened, except that I was told by dozens of friends that I was being hunted for with a fine-tooth comb, and that *Partridge II's* sailing was held up until I was discovered. I took no action whatever, letting Authority think what it wished; for there was now a peace on. Then I was instructed to attend a medical board, where fatherly old surgeons asked me if I felt strong enough to travel overland to England. I thought it might be possible, and, securing my papers, went down to the Union Club.

The first man I saw was my Commodore. He considered me with eyes like boiled onions.

"I'm looking for you," he grated. "What's happened to you?"

"I've just been invalided home," I said. He frowned, then he shoved out a hand.

"You've beaten me, Shaw—have a drink?" he said; and we made our peace.

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CHAPTER XXXI

CLEWED UP

THREE days later I reached London, the period of my knocking around at an end. I was bubbling with enthusiastic desire to write the story of the war from all angles; the story by a man who'd seen and heard and tried to do: I danced into my publisher's offices with the offer.

"The war's old stuff now," I was told; "no one wants to read a word about it!"

It was true. The monstrous combat had lost its topical interest and had not become historical. Folks were nauseated with it all; they were staggered and dazed and wanted to forget the bitter, bitter years. So my experience seemed to a great extent wasted, from the point of view of "copy"; but it has filled my mind with treasured memories, and some of them may still see the light. For there is enough of interest in the war, even leaving out the blood and mud, to occupy a coming generation all through its years. We are forgetting old hatreds and old ambitions, maybe; but certain details are best remembered—and chiefest of all, I contend is the sheer crass futility of the war-idea.

By contrast with war-experiences all further adventures seem tame and lacking in colour. I got myself demobilized—not easily, for officialdom seemed determined to hang on to us volunteers to the last—probably to account for its existence—and settled down to the eventless existence of a fiction-writer again. Inside a year the war and all pertaining to it was but a blurred memory. There was more concern in turning out a readable story than in tackling an enemy submarine or blowing an enemy battery into nothingness.

Beyond a cruise to the Islands; a trawler-trip to Shetland; a run across the Atlantic in an oil-tank, the ensuing years

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have been placid and serene. What adventures have occurred have been adventures of the mind—meetings with outstanding figures in the world of literary adventure.

But occasionally the Red Gods call again; and I begin to wonder—to wonder! Does this life hold any further surprises, or must adventure next be sought in a new dimension? It is on the Knees of the Red Gods themselves. The skipper of my oil-tanker, who had seen so much that my experiences would hardly have filled a dog-watch of his life, told me the other day about New Guinea, where gold has been found according to prophecy.

I wonder!

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